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THE GOOD LIFE MAGAZINE FOR MEN

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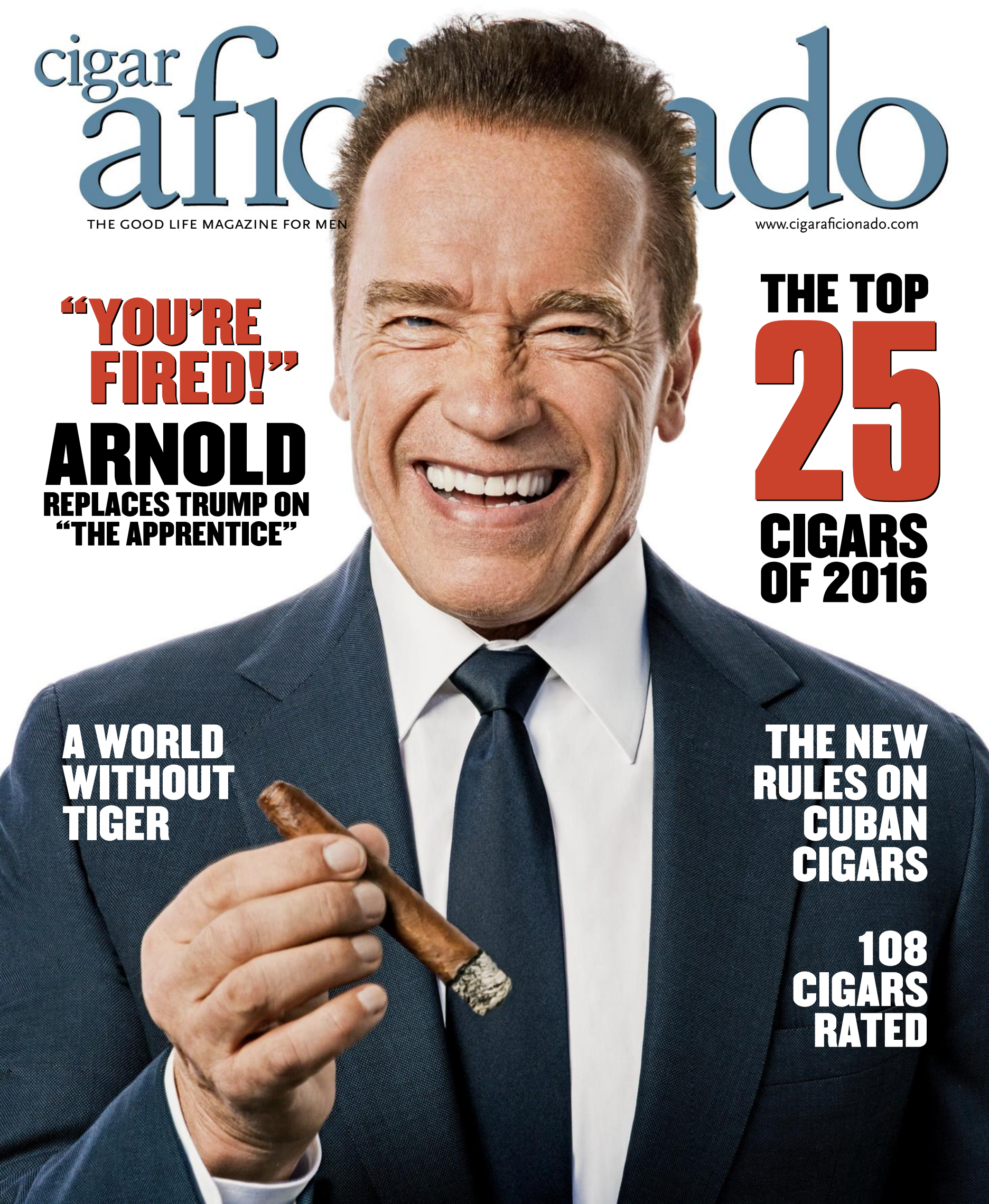
**“YOU’RE
FIRED!”
ARNOLD
REPLACES TRUMP ON
“THE APPRENTICE”**

**THE TOP
25
CIGARS
OF 2016**

**A WORLD
WITHOUT
TIGER**

**THE NEW
RULES ON
CUBAN
CIGARS**

**108
CIGARS
RATED**





John Walker & Sons

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january/february 2017

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ON THE COVER

Arnold Schwarzenegger is fired up for business.
photograph by Jim Wright



*From sweet to spicy to bold,
there's no shortage of flavorful characters
to choose to spend your afternoon with.*

SURGEON GENERAL WARNING: Tobacco
Smoke Increases The Risk Of Lung Cancer
And Heart Disease, Even In Nonsmokers.



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drink III **A POCKET FULL OF RYES**
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cigars

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I60 **MADE FOR YOU**
A Rolls-Royce picnic basket; personal documentaries; tour-level golf balls; shoes that mold to your feet; high-tech cocktail muddlers; and a steamer to get the smoke out.



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III



I36

highlights

Our top-scoring cigars in this latest taste test come from around the cigar world, and each of the industry's three largest handmade cigar-producing countries—the Dominican Republic, Cuba and Nicaragua—are represented here. The Ashton Symmetry Belicoso earned our highest score in this blind review, earning 93 points. It stands alone among Ashtons for its Nicaraguan tobacco, something Ashton says doesn't exist in its other blends. It's rolled by the Fuente family. A host of cigars scored 92 points, including a legendary Cuban Churchill, a newer Nicaraguan robusto and a well-known short smoke from one of the cigar world's most vaunted brands. Fat cigars continue to enthrall cigar consumers, and our Grande category of 60-ring-gauge smokes saw a four-way tie for top score at 91 points. For insight on fat cigars and their portly history, see our story on page 136.



TOP FIGURADO

ASHTON SYMMETRY BELICOSO

The newest incarnation of the vaunted Ashton brand has Nicaraguan tobacco in its mix, which is blended by Carlos Fuente Jr.

DOM. REP.

93



TOP CHURCHILL

ROMEO Y JULIETA CHURCHILL

One of Cuba's most famous large cigars, the Romeo y Julieta Churchill sets the standard for cigars measuring 7 inches long by 47 ring gauge.

CUBA

92



TOP CORONA GORDA

ESPINOSA HABANO NO. 4

Crafted in the small but standout La Zona cigar factory in Nicaragua, Espinosa Habano cigars continue to impress in our blind tastings.

NICARAGUA

92



TOP MISCELLANEOUS

PADRÓN SERIE 1926 NO. 35 MADURO

Sometimes cigars are named after family members, important dates or heroes from history. This diminutive Padrón is named 35 for an intriguing reason: that's how many minutes it takes the company president to smoke one.

NICARAGUA

92



TOP ROBUSTO

CLE PRIETO 50X5

Christian Eiroa is one of the old-school names of Honduran cigars, but he took the operation to Nicaragua for his new CLE Prieto brand, which took top honors in our robusto category.

NICARAGUA

92



TOP GRANDE

UNDERCROWN SHADE GORDITO

Drew Estate's milder version of Undercrown tied with a Nat Sherman Metropolitan Habano Selection, a Punch Signature and a La Galera for the best score in our category dedicated to 60-ring-gauge smokes.

NICARAGUA

91

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Black



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Arnold—He's Back

There are plenty of celebrities around the world who love a great cigar. We challenge you to find one who enjoys them as much as Arnold Schwarzenegger. He began smoking cigars in the 1970s and he still adores them today.

He's a man of many nicknames. The Terminator. Conan. The Austrian Oak. The Governator. But for most people, and for us, he is quite simply Arnold. And he's back.

Arnold makes history with this cover appearance, as no other person has ever appeared three times on the cover of our magazine. (His first cover was Summer of 1996, when we were still a quarterly, and his second was August 2003.) He's not only back in our book, he's back in the lime-light in a big way, stepping into the shoes vacated by President-elect Donald Trump in the network television series "The New Celebrity Apprentice," which debuts on NBC on January 2. Will he adopt the Trump catchphrase "You're fired," when dismissing a contestant, or will he go his own way, saying "You're terminated," or perhaps "Hasta la vista?"

Arnold has experience as a boss, for as you'll read in our cover story, beginning on page 72, he's a lot more than muscle and movies. He was a business success before his first hit, a millionaire before he was Conan the Barbarian. He's succeeded again and again, conquering the world of bodybuilding, then film and being elected governor of California, the biggest economy in the United States. And he's done it all while smoking cigars. When California law forbade him from lighting up in the statehouse, he built a cigar-friendly tent in the courtyard. That's thinking outside the box.

Also in this issue, we review the changes to U.S. law that finally allow Americans to legally bring Cuban cigars back into the United States, not only from Cuba but from London, Paris, Geneva and elsewhere. It's a change we have long lobbied for, and one we welcome, but it comes with important caveats. Restrictions still remain. Get informed with our important update on page 97.

This issue also contains our annual ranking of the best cigars of the year, the 25 finest smokes that have emerged victorious after our tournament of champions. Who survived the world's toughest taste test to be named Cigar of the Year? Turn to page 46.

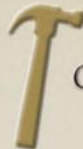
There's much more to this issue. We imagine a golf world without Tiger Woods, and name the players who would have had far different careers had Tiger never teed it up as a pro. We bring you into the high-stakes world of baccarat and introduce you to the woman who won more than \$70 million with her controversial technique. We look at the spiciest of whiskies, rye, and pair it with exceptional cigars.

Light up a cigar, sit back in your favorite chair and enjoy this issue.

MARVIN R. SHANKEN
EDITOR & PUBLISHER

DAVID SAVONA
EXECUTIVE EDITOR



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1964

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From the makers
of Aging Room
No.2 Cigar of 2013
www.BoutiqueBlends.com



out of the humidor

Dear Marvin,

It was sad for me to read your story about the passing of Carlos Fuente Sr. ["Death of a Legend," December 2016].

Back in the spring of 2011, my brother, my nephew and I took a mini trip to Tampa to celebrate my retirement from the fire service and to watch our beloved Chicago White Sox take on the Tampa Bay Rays. While down there, we went to the "Little Cuba" area of Tampa, Ybor City. We visited some small shops, ate local fare and went cigar shopping. My brother Tom said we need to check out this factory where cigar "seconds" are sold. Walking inside, up a flight of wooden stairs, we entered a small shop filled with many boxes of cigars. Inside were three people who turned out to be part of the Fuente family. They each helped us choose our cigars. I didn't know who it was at the time, but Carlos Fuente Sr. started asking me questions on my preferred taste in cigars. He also asked me why we were in Tampa and congratulated me on my retirement.

He noticed my Chicago sports clothing—a White Sox jersey and Blackhawks T-shirt—and asked me if I knew the man in the picture on the wall. It was a picture of Chicago Bears player and Super Bowl-winning coach Mike Ditka. Standing next to him in the photo was Carlos Fuente Sr.

Carlos Jr. suggested that the three of us take a picture. I am honored to have met these men and wish the family strength during this difficult time.

Please extend our sympathy to the Fuente family on the passing of their father.

Pat Trunda, Tom Trunda and Nicholas Heer
Chicago, Illinois

Dear Marvin,

Your enticing feature on greens of the Emerald Isle ["Ireland's Stunning Coast," October 2016], notes that farther out of the way, but perhaps worth the effort, is the Dingle Golf Club on the Dingle Peninsula. I can vouch that it is well worth the visit; not only because it is the westernmost course in Europe, but as a stiff challenge for the strongest of storm lighters in lighting a cigar and composing that moment to remember. For a unique pair of photographs, you need to travel 2,000 miles west before encountering the easternmost golf course in North America, the Terra Nova (Twin Rivers) on Newfoundland. Go to it readers!

Malcolm Watson
Welford, Newbury, Berkshire
United Kingdom



"I appreciate your carefully considered Editors' Note regarding new cigar brands and releases. Who is the government trying to protect?"

—Joe Calenda, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

Dear Marvin,

Thank you for another outstanding issue of CIGAR AFICIONADO. Receiving the magazine in the mail and reading it in my backyard villa while smoking a cigar is a luxury in my life; one for which I am very grateful.

I really enjoyed reading "Top Chefs Who Love Cigars" [December 2016]. I look forward to future issues featuring actors who love cigars, politicians who love cigars...And it got me to thinking. How about featuring ordinary Joe's who love cigars? These are regular people not necessarily celebrated beyond their local community, with a "common man/common woman" story that would be of interest to your readers.

By the way I appreciate your carefully considered Editors' Note regarding the introduction of new cigar brands and releases into the market. Who is the government trying to protect?

Joe Calenda

Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

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cigar aficionado

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Editor & Publisher

Executive Editor
Senior Features Editor
Art Director
Senior Editor
Associate Editor
Tasting Coordinator/Editorial Assistant
Editorial Assistant

MARVIN R. SHANKEN

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JACK BETTRIDGE
JOHN THOMPSON
GREGORY MOTTOLA
ANDREW NAGY
DAVID CLOUGH
BLAKE DROESCH

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Dear Marvin,

A past issue of CIGAR AFICIONADO published a letter from a Canadian subscriber criticizing the diverse articles and non-cigar issues covered in the magazine. The response from the editors was respectful and deft. The kind, uplifting reply to an otherwise acerbic snip at the magazine galvanized my affection for CIGAR AFICIONADO.

The one- and two-page articles covering fine items and diverse locations from around the world go well with the exposés on fine cigars. Holding your upscale publication to single-subject entries would be a kiss of death to the publication.

Seldom do we see or hear of a person that likes to sit in a self-imposed sequester isolated with a hand-rolled cigar and kept from other boutique items. In contrast: At times I personally have savored the draw of a handmade cigar in one hand and a shot of 100-year-old Grand Marnier in the other, watching the sun set across a Nassau beach (of Graycliff fame), with gratitude for those and other fine things in life. CIGAR AFICIONADO extends the exposure and thus awareness to even more abundant and boutique opportunities.

The cigar industry is rife with cross-business fertilization. Many do not travel as I do. Thus they are left with CIGAR AFICIONADO to fill the imagination. That we may further the joy of such learning, please keep the format and publication as it is.

*J. Bradley Oakes
Milpitas, California*

Dear Marvin,

Just wanted to personally thank you and the gang for putting on another great Big Smoke event in Las Vegas. My friends and I had a great time and enjoyed the company of fellow cigar enthusiasts. As I listened to the "Next Generation" panelists, and especially since two of them were women, I wondered: will the tagline of the magazine, "the good life magazine for men" soon be revised to "the good life magazine for cigar enthusiasts," or something along those lines?

*Mark Sehgal
McAlester, Oklahoma*

Editors' Response: Thanks for being part of the Big Smoke Las Vegas seminars. While we appreciate the many women who read our magazine and enjoy fine cigars, our tagline will remain unchanged. CIGAR AFICIONADO is, and has always been, a men's magazine. ❖

Clarification: In the profile of Mike Piazza [December], he and Tom Seaver were referred to as "the only Mets to enter the Hall of Fame as players." They are actually the only players who went into the Hall of Fame as New York Mets.

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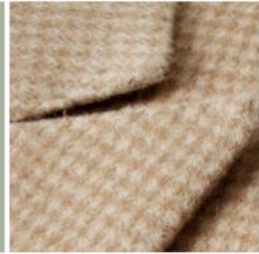
PLASENCIA
CIGARS

CRAFTING BOLDNESS
SINCE 1865

good life guide

Living well demands that we indulge in things that are of superior quality and excellent origin. This guide aspires to find and recommend the best of everything to aficionados of the good life.

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WARNING: Smoking cigars regularly poses risks of cancer of the mouth, throat, larynx, and esophagus similar to smoking cigarettes.



The Joy of Tawny Port

If your take on the classic combination of Port and a cigar includes only the thick, dark wine labeled as “vintage,” you’re not giving Port all the credit it deserves. It’s time to consider tawny Port.

Each type brings its own charms to a cigar pairing. Richer in feel and flavor, vintage Port exudes notes like fruitcake, licorice, bramble and cobbler. Its racy sibling, tawny, emphasizes more elegant notes of caramel, hazelnut, almond, cinnamon and dried fruits and flowers.

Both are fortified wines, born from the same process. During fermentation a neutral brandy is added to the grape must (juice, skins, seeds and stems), which stops the conversion of sugar to alcohol. The wines end up sweeter, but with more alcohol (about 20 percent, or 40 proof).

It’s in maturation that the two Ports diverge. Vintage examples are aged in oak for just two or three years before being bottled and labeled by the year the grapes were grown. Buyers expect to squirrel them away for decades while they develop their potential. By contrast, tawny Ports stay in wood casks for one to three decades. The result is a lighter-colored wine that is ready to consume off the shelf. This long cask aging also means no sediment and a wine that will keep in the refrigerator for a

month or two after opening. (Vintage Ports last only a week or so.)

Most tawny Ports are blended from a range of years and are labeled with age-statement averages of 10, 20 or 30 years. Wine & Soul Tawny Port 10 Years Old NV (\$50), with its streamlined feel, showed birch beer, cinnamon, dried cherry and toasted raisin bread, while scoring 91 points in *Wine Spectator*, CIGAR AFICIONADO’s sister publication. Churchill Tawny Port 30 Years Old NV (93 points, \$110) married hedonism and intellectualism, with an array of nuts, bergamot and caramel.

A second tawny option is single-vintage wine—sometimes called *colheita*—which focuses on a particular year even while featuring extensive wood aging. Poças Junior Port Colheita 1997 (94 points, \$75) is an energetic sweet wine from a powerful vintage, with notes of ginger beer, Earl Grey tea, toffee, singed sesame and salted caramel. Taylor Fladgate Port Single Harvest Very Old 1967 (98 points, \$300) draws you in with a pistachio aroma before showering the palate with a spectrum of buckwheat, toasted sesame, walnut shell, menthol and licorice that has such viscosity and tension that it seems to cry out for a cigar partner.

—James Molesworth



The Ritz-Carlton's two Naples, Florida, properties offer a choice of inland golfing and seaside bliss.

Ritz-Carltons of Naples, Florida

For sand traps and sandy beaches, for scrumptious eats and opulent shopping, well-heeled northerners who would rather wear sandals in the winter have long gone to Naples, Florida.

Naples sings a song of casual affluence, and what better place for Ritz-Carlton to play a duet. It has two properties in Naples, the Ritz-Carlton Naples on the beach and the Ritz-Carlton Golf Resort Naples at the upscale inland Tiburon development. The properties bring the world of Naples together with golf, tennis, surf and sun through a connection of a shuttle and sophistication.

The Ritz-Carlton Golf Resort has the higher visibility of the two. The Greg Norman's Franklin-Templeton Shootout event held on the Gold Course has been a fixture for 15 years, and the LPGA's final event of the season, the CME Group Tour Championship has been there since 2015. Two courses designed by Norman, serving both the hotel and the Tiburon community as a private club, provide a clubby atmosphere often lacking in a purely resort setting. The golf pro shop has an impressive array of golf fashions over a wide range of lines.

The hotel has renovated its 295 rooms and club lounge and is reimagining its dining spaces. What it didn't need to reimagine were its levels of service and comfort, which are typically Ritz. You could always take the short walk to the golf clubhouse for lunch or a quaff, but just

sitting on the back patio—the Bella Vista Lounge—outside the lobby bar gives you a view of the course and the tropical landscaping as well as a place to smoke a cigar, several brands of which are offered at the bar.

Pools and a small spa facility grace the golf resort, but if it's the beach or the full spa experience you want, you can hop the complimentary shuttle to the other Ritz, 10 minutes away. There, the full glory of the Gulf of Mexico can be yours, as well as a 50,000-square-foot spa that offers all manner of treatments and pampering. Plus, a full-service beach facility with lounges, drinks and dining services is at hand.

Most of the Ritz on the Gulf eateries, such as the casual Gumbo Limbo and adjoining Sand Bar, Terrazza, take advantage of the beach setting. For the Sushi lover there is Dusk, with outdoor seating and a 13-course menu is served *Omakase*-style, which translates to "I'll leave it to you," and in this case means being served the delights of chef Harunobu Furuta at his whim. A steakhouse, The Grill, offers more formal dining. And you are located a short drive or cab ride from 5th Avenue South, Naples' dining, shopping and cultural center.

So, if a Naples trip is in your plans, you can "put on the Ritz." In this case, two of them.

Visit ritzcarlton.com

—Jeff Williams



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Jose' Pepin Garcia



TOP 25 CIGARS OF THE YEAR

- 2015:** MY FATHER LE BIJOU 1922 - TORPEDO BOX PRESSED
"CIGAR OF THE YEAR".
- 2014:** MY FATHER #3 - CREMA.
- 2013:** MY FATHER LE BIJOU 1922 - TORPEDO BOX PRESSED.
- 2012:** FLOR DE LAS ANTILLAS - TORO "CIGAR OF THE YEAR".
- 2011:** LA RELOBA SELECCION SUMATRA - TORPEDO.
- 2010:** MY FATHER #2 - BELICOSO.
- 2009:** MY FATHER #1 - ROBUSTO.
- 2008:** DON PEPIN GARCIA ORIGINAL - LANCERO.
- 2007:** DON PEPIN GARCIA CUBAN CLASSIC - ROBUSTO 1979.

No 1
CIGAR OF THE YEAR

RATED
96
Cigar
Aficionado
2012

cigar By
aficionado



MY FATHER
CIGARS

Don Pepín García
FAMILY



No 1
CIGAR OF THE YEAR

RATED
97
Cigar
Aficionado
2015



The Camel Hair Jacket

It's easy to think of camel hair strictly as the fabric for dowdy jackets or overcoats worn by the polo set. But take another look. The breathable winter fabric is getting more versatile. Once seen strictly in solid tan, camel hair jackets, like the one pictured from Kiton (\$5,845), are sporting patterns and rakish peak lapels. Last year, Caruso took a bold step making an entire suit out of blue pinstripe camel hair. The fabric house Loro Piana further boosted camel hair's image by spinning from fibers as small as 17 microns, comparable to a Super 120 fabric.

Camel hair has always had its natural thermostatic properties, providing insulation in the cold and keeping its wearer cool in the heat. You can thank the Bactrian camel—from which hair is collected to make fiber—for these heat-regulating characteristics. This particular camel (two humps, not one) makes its habitat in a wide range of climates and altitudes across Central Asia. Its fine, soft undercoat is collected by shearing, combing, or simply waiting for the camel to naturally molt. Regardless, the camel is not harmed by sharing its coat with us.

Now a staple of luxury fashion, the camel look was imported by

equestrian Brits in the 1920s and 30s. The fabric has remained in men's fashion ever since, though now it's used in everything from powerful-looking blazers and accessories to three-piece suits. It is most familiar in its natural golden-tan color, but camel hair can be dyed a range of colors or blended with other threads to create fabrics with extra softness, flexibility or shine. The fabric has a smooth hand like cashmere, but isn't as soft and delicate—a favorable quality if your clothes take a beating.

To stay warm this winter, consider Brooks Brothers Two-Button Camel Hair Sport Coat, with notched lapels, a center vent, flap pockets and leather wrapped buttons (the unattached sleeve buttons can be made functional, \$698). You might also choose the Hickey Freeman Baby Camel Hair Jacket, a stylish two-button offering with notched lapels, side vents, and half lining for added mobility. This eye-catching garment is sewn from 100 percent baby camel hair—prized for its comfort and softness (\$1,495).

Visit brooksbrothers.com, hickeyfreeman.com, kiton.it

—David Clough



2017 CANADIAN WHISKY of the YEAR



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— Jim Murray, Whisky Bible

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— Tony Sachs, Robb Report

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— Jake Emen, Eater



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EACH BRUISE WAS A LESSON, EVERY SCAR HAS A STORY.

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The Swatch Revolution

The Swiss labeled it The Crisis. The Swiss mechanical watch industry was in a death spiral as cheap, highly accurate quartz watches from Asia had flooded the market during the '70s. Watch production dwindled, companies were shuttered, countless jobs were lost, and mechanical movements, considered worthless at the time, were reportedly dumped in lakes. But in 1983 Nicolas Hayek, who'd been asked to liquidate two ailing Swiss watch firms, had a genius vision: he would produce affordable, design-driven, plastic Swiss-made quartz watches that would compete by bringing a wow fashion factor to what were essentially commodity items.

Swatches were collectible, trendy and—thanks to their special editions and collaborations with artists, fashion designers and pop culture luminaries—expressive. The first Swatch/artist collaboration was with Kiki Picasso, and the 120 pieces from the 1985 edition are now the most valued Swatches in the resale market at \$20,000 to \$30,000. A 2015 auction of Swatches raked in \$6 million for about 5,800 pieces.

Swatch not only made quartz watches cool and coveted, but helped the Swiss mechanical watch industry survive—and thrive. By the '90s, high-end Swiss watch brands managed to reposition their products as badges of status and sophistication rather than mere timekeepers. By selling the sizzle as opposed to the steak, they appealed to aspirational emotions rather than utilitarian function. And the Swatch Group also acted as a dominant force in the resurgence, supplying movements and other essential components to the industry at large and scooping up such legendary names as Breguet, Blancpain and Omega along the way.

In 2013, Swatch introduced its own take on the mechanical movement with the Sistem51, powered by the brand's first in-house automatic movement, the first of its kind built entirely by machine. Sistem51's movement has only 51 parts, boasts 17 pending patents and a 90-hour power reserve, all in a watch that sells for about \$150. Battery not required. You can even view the movement through the case back, the same as with pricey Swiss timepieces. And this year, the aptly named Sistem51 Irony (\$195 to \$235), steps it up in stainless steel and further scales up the collection with dials appointed with luminous SuperLuminova indexes, as well as straps made of rubber (instead of silicone) and padded leather.

For those collectors who demand more exclusivity, the Swatch Club offers special editions to members only. The latest Club design, Piolin's Time, took its inspiration from a colorful, hand-embroidered wall hanging, "Selva Blanca" by Argentinian artists Leo Chiachio and Daniel Giannone. Limited to 2,626 numbered pieces, the watch is embroidered with vivid motifs interpreted from the original work featuring the artists' pet Dachshund, Piolin.

Always count on Swatch to lighten the mood. While we still treasure our high horology masterpieces—and the niche isn't going anywhere—sometimes, we just want to have some fun.

Visit swatch.com

—Laurie Kahle





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NEW RELEASES

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El Año

Illumination





Rolls-Royce Dawn

If it hasn't dawned on you yet, there've been some big changes at Rolls-Royce in recent years. And one of the most obvious signs is the arrival of the new Rolls Dawn convertible. No, the staid British maker isn't about to move into the mainstream, and it isn't shifting gears to battery power—at least not immediately. But it is expanding its lineup with a series of new products that gives the elite marque a more modern look and feel while retaining that classic elegance and exclusivity that have made it an icon for more than a century.

Let's start by pointing out that the new Rolls-Royce Dawn is, in British lingo, a "drophead," or convertible. But for the fabric top, it shares most of its basics with Rolls's Wraith coupe. The British maker likes to call the new entry "the sexiest Rolls-Royce ever built," and if the looks and sighs it drew during several days of driving in and around Boston are any indication, that's clearly no exaggeration.

There's something more approachable about the Dawn than that classic Rolls-Royce flagship, the Phantom. And while at least some buyers may still prefer to luxuriate in the spacious back seat, letting the chauffeur negotiate traffic, there are plenty of reasons why they might also opt to take on driving duties.

Start with the 6.6-liter twin-turbo V-12 under that long and elegantly sculpted bonnet—sorry, hood—which makes an impressive 563

horsepower. That's the sort of number you might expect from an exotic supercar and, even with a mass of nearly three tons, you'll be in for a surprise the first time you mash the throttle and feel yourself sink into the plush, leather seats. Dawn's solid chassis and firm suspension delivered another surprise as we charged along some winding old roads outside of Boston. "Sporty" is not a term normally associated with Rolls-Royce, but Dawn could change that perception.

Of course, you can set the electronically controlled suspension to comfort mode and all but float over the roughest roads, the top down and the wind in your hair. There's something about the way the drophead has been outfitted: only the plushiest of cowhides and the most elegantly hand-finished woods make it into the cabin. There are, of course, all the latest digital infotainment features, as well as the most modern electronic safety systems, such as active cruise control with automatic emergency braking.

The Rolls-Royce Dawn somehow finds a way to balance old-school and new while remaining true to the brand. And lest you worry about seeing too many of them on the road, it remains, at about \$400,000, within reach of only the most elite of the one-percenters.

Visit rollsroycemotorcars.com

—Paul A. Eisenstein



The Truth About Jamon Iberico

If you've been underwhelmed after trying Spain's much-hyped Jamon Iberico, there's a reason: you probably weren't tasting the best. Banned by the U.S. Department of Agriculture until a decade ago, the luxury, free-range Iberian ham with the rich, nutty splendor was known here only by its reputation. What wasn't clear when the import floodgates opened was that it comes in several grades. Some are merely good. The utmost—those that exhibit a rare combination of breeding, feeding and curing—are exquisite and fetch prices of \$190 a pound. To get the real deal you must learn to read the label or simply buy from brands like Cinco Jotas (aka 5J) that import only the top tier.

Spain designates the best as black label. It starts with a purebred Iberian pig, called *pata negra* for its black hooves. Lesser grades use crossbred pigs that are more prolific and earlier to develop. Another difference is diet. Optimally, the pig feeds exclusively on fallen acorns as it roams the Andalusian oak forests during the last three months of its life. This is how it gets its oily, nutty character. Such pigs will be stamped *bellota* (Spanish for acorn). However, red label pigs (crossbreeds) also share that designation. Green label indicates crossbred pigs fed with a mix of acorns and

grain. White label hams are crossbred and never eat a single acorn.

Since 2010, the Spanish government has gotten much stricter with the labeling requirements of its Iberico hams. Manufacturers now have to specify the details of breeding and diet. Aging is also important. Ideally, these haughty hocks should spend three years in a curing facility.

To enjoy Iberico ham you can find a restaurant that serves Cinco Jotas Iberico. More involved is buying and cutting the whole leg, but you'll also need a ham holder, the right cutlery and lessons on the proper technique. Besides, that's a lot of ham for one household. Better to find a purveyor that sells it by the slice. Cinco Jotas hams are available in precut packets from such mail-order outfits as La Tienda and Hamlovers.com, which specialize in Spanish imports.

Served at room temperature, each glistening piece should pretty much melt in your mouth. That's not an opinion, it's actually scientific fact. Acorns are high in oleic acid, giving the pig fat not only a sublime taste, but a low melting point that results in a true porcine epiphany.

Visit cincojotas.com, tienda.com, hamlovers.com

—Gregory Mottola

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Fire Irons

Since the first time a caveman sharpened a stick and skewered his hunk of saber-toothed tiger because he wanted his meat dead-on medium rare—not bloody, but certainly not burnt—man has worked fires with tools. The instinct to poke at a blaze remains, but today's instruments are hardly as crude and far more effective.

Cooking in front of an open pit may have taken a back seat to sitting around enclosed flames, but every hearth deserves a sturdy, rugged set of fire irons. They should be handy and functional as well as attractive, quality tools that can stand up to a three-pound chunk of burning oak.

In managing a blaze, Job No. 1 is making adjustments to your fire as it burns. You move wood around the andirons to create precise air holes to feed the flame essential oxygen.

For this, the poker is the indispensable tool you reach for most often. Its tip is used to ease logs back and forth,

trying to find that little opening between stacked wood that optimizes air flow. The halberd-style hook is your friend for bigger jobs, best employed to pull wayward logs back into proper position.

The rake is a less common, but comes in handy after the early logs have been rendered to coals. Those glowing coals at the bottom of your fire will feed the flames for hours, if properly tended. An apparently dead fire can be rekindled simply by working the embers. The rake can also be used with the poker for major log rearrangement. Some sets include a pair of tongs for this.

The brush and the spade work in tandem, for cleanup. The spade can also be employed for moving coals around, should they need to be moved farther than the rake would allow.

Go cheap and you will be frustrated. The Leather Rivet Hearth Tool Set from Restoration Hardware (\$325) is a fine example of quality; a masculine set crafted by California blacksmith Jefferson Mack and his

team. Iron comes from the furnace blazing red, is slapped on the anvil and hand forged with hammers to take on the final shape. The set is hefty and well balanced, with a strip of leather for a handle to keep your hands cool as you channel your inner Prometheus.

Once your fire is set, you'll need a more fragile tool: a rocks glass. In the cold months we recommend a peaty single malt, a robust cigar and a good book to be your company in front of the fire.

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—David Savona

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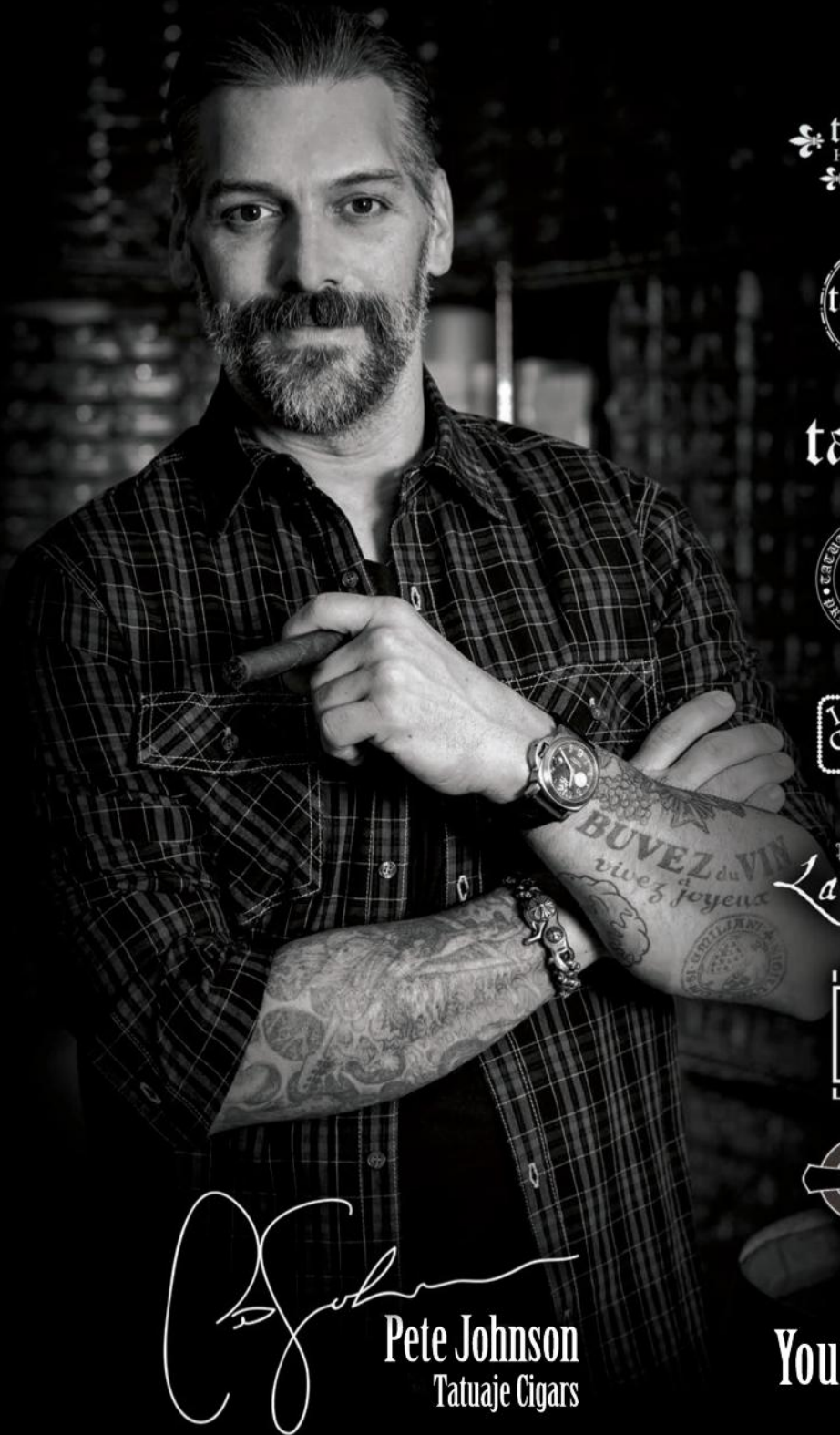
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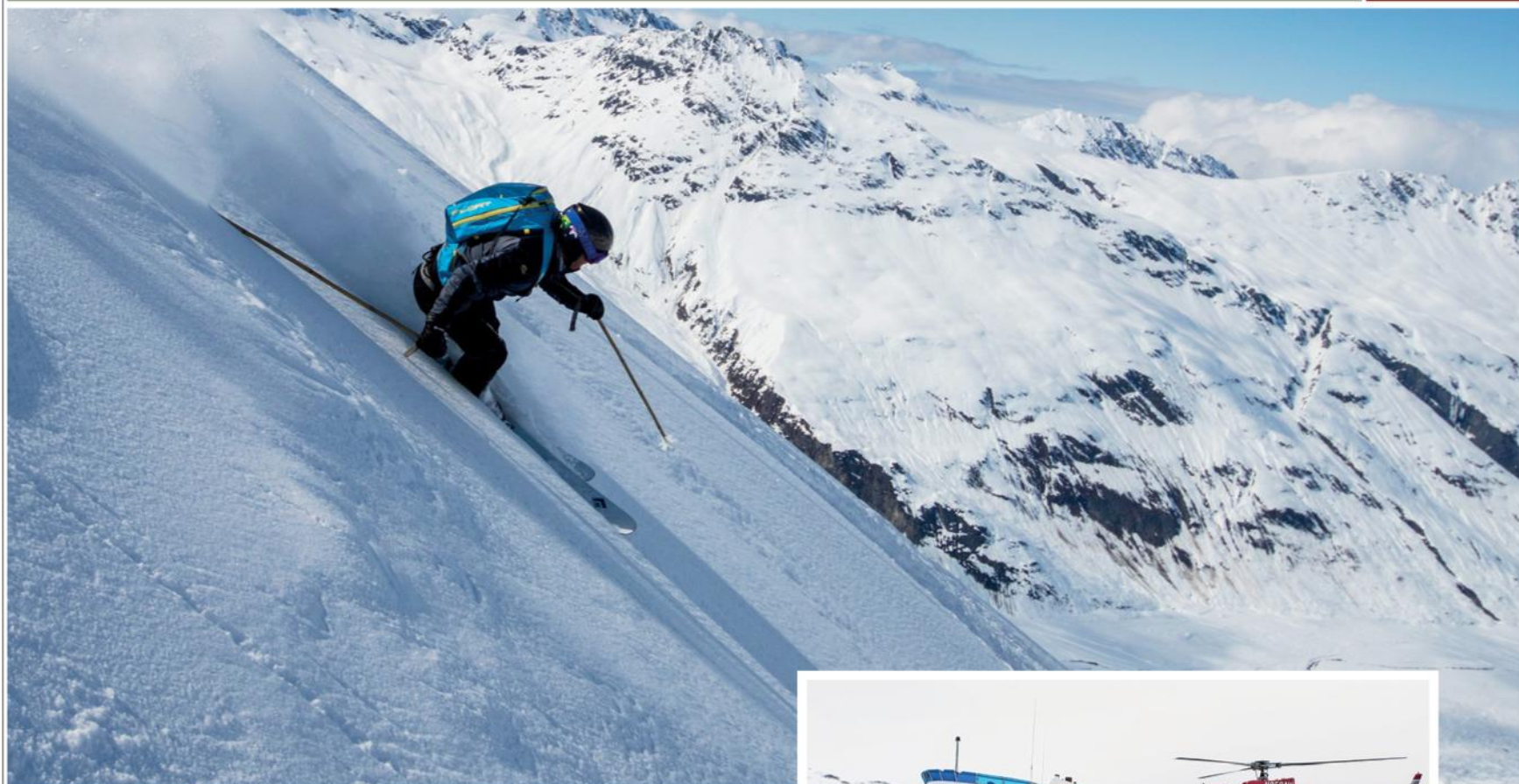
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Yacht-Based Heli-Skiing

For avid skiers, heli-skiing is the sport's Holy Grail. It promises deep unbroken powder on every run, all day long as well as no crowds and no lift lines—in fact, no lifts. That means more time going down, less time going up, and even the time aloft is spectacular, something people pay top dollar to do all around the world just for the scenery—except skiers do it eight to 10 times a day in some of the most stunning settings on earth. Hardly anyplace has had heli-skiing, but few destinations are more acclaimed than Alaska, with famously reliable snowfall, first-world safety and aviation standards and thousands of square miles of dramatic, varied terrain. It's all long descents and stunning vistas, from knife-edged peaks to glaciers to coastal fjords.

But even in this alpine paradise, some options stand above the others, and it is hard to beat the uniquely decadent yacht-based operation offered by Black Ops, a veteran outfitter headquartered in Alaska's heli-ski capital of Valdez. While most companies use remote mountain lodges or rustic cabins, this new package for 2017 includes accommodations aboard the 72-foot *Christian*, sailing on Prince William Sound. A seven-night private trip mixes incredible skiing with creature comforts, taking off directly from the yacht and returning guests to its deck—just steps from the open air aft hot tub, where tired legs can recover while watching the glaciers go by. The helicopter, a best of breed A-Star B-350, provides skiers and snowboarders access to the most remote slopes in the Chugach Mountains, 2,500 square miles of mountains and glaciated terrain which average more than 1,000 inches of snow each winter. Where you ski is customizable



for your group's desires, with terrain suitable for intermediate to advanced skiers and snowboarders and runs ranging from 2,500 to 6,000 vertical feet.

The yacht has deluxe accommodations for up to eight people, and the package includes 14 hours of flight time, with additional hours available for purchase. Two professional heli-ski guides (some outfits use one, but front and back is safer) are always on hand. All other yacht-based activities, including fishing and kayaking, are included, as are all meals—such as fresh wild Copper River salmon—and all beverages. Cutting-edge safety gear including airbag packs, beacons, harnesses, shovels and probes are also provided. Rates start at \$89,600 a week.

Black Ops also runs one of the poshest lodge-based heli operations in the state, Robe Lake Lodge, a log chalet built in 2008, complete with hot tub, sauna, Internet, satellite TV, private chef and panoramic views. With just six rooms, the lodge is ideal for six to 10-person private groups. For 2017 the company is adding a more adventurous option, a new remote helicopter accessed ski-touring basecamp in the Chugach outside Thompson Pass, using Arctic Oven heated tents, made in Alaska to withstand extreme conditions. Of course, there's always the yacht.

Visit blackopsvaldez.com

—Larry Olmsted



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Listening Clubs

It's often said that it's better to have a friend with a boat than to own one. The same may apply to truly amazing sound systems: it's best to let someone else pay, because a planned \$5,000 investment can quickly swell to 10 or 20 times that amount. And when system costs head toward half a million dollars as they have at Spiritland, a new café-bar in London's emerging King's Cross district, it's best left to the pros.

Spiritland is one in a spate of clubs and restaurants in London that devote themselves to the purity of sound. It's a bold effort to reclaim music quality that has been lost in the streaming, digital, just-play-it-from-the-iPhone era. While Spiritland operates as a café during the day and a bar at night, these new establishments are not about clubbing and dancing, they are about hearing music in a peaceful setting with almost unbelievable clarity.

The custom-built sound system here is remarkable: a handbuilt four-channel, 12-input rotary mixer by Isonoe, amplification from Atelier Du Triode and a towering Kuzma turntable used to play whole albums at a time. When the DJ deigns to play digital it goes through a dCS Vivaldi digital-to-analog converter. Some equipment is also offered for sale, if you should catch the audio bug.

It's not necessary to test the Spiritland system at loud volumes to understand what it offers. It's an intimate sound, with the timbre and emotion of a singer's voice heard as never before, and it's possible to hear a band gel because of the clarity offered each instrument. You never feel the system straining to pull its weight. There is ample, unused power in reserve, which makes the overall sound more assured.

Artistic director Paul Noble says full-on rock like Led Zeppelin can be too intense in the relatively small space, while simpler recordings like Muddy Waters playing acoustic guitar can reveal incredible depth. Indeed, turning the volume up on Muddy's "My Home is in the Delta" gives listeners a chill—his voice and guitar shimmering with deep emotion. The system works great for dub, rhythm and blues, reggae and jazz, and sparkles with classical music, seen as the most demanding test.

"We're looking to put a lot of the love and detail and attention back into listening to music," Noble says. "We wanted to present the music with the best possible equipment, totally uncompromising, which allows a really deep exploration of all genres of music."

Visit spiritland.com

—Gregory Katz



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HONDA

TOP 25

CIGARS OF 2016

Our annual reassessment of the highest-scoring cigars of the year reveals the elite performers that were steadfast enough to be named best of the best

Distinction and consistency are the hallmarks of high quality in the cigar world. There are plenty of merely good cigars in existence. Many great ones too. But CIGAR AFICIONADO's list of Top 25 cigars showcases the exemplary—smokes that, even after multiple rounds of scrutiny and analysis, continue to produce one of life's finest experiences. Now in its 13th year, the CIGAR AFICIONADO Top 25 list is a tournament of sorts. First, we review the lineup of

cigars rated throughout the year in CIGAR AFICIONADO and *Cigar Insider*—nearly 750. Then, we choose the cigars that scored 91 points or higher (but eliminate brand redundancies). After that, our tasting coordinator purchases those cigars at retail, strips the identifying bands and passes them out to our panel for an entirely new blind-tasting process. What remains after elimination are 25 of the most sublime, memorable and extraordinary smokes of the year.

..... **BY GREGORY MOTTOLA**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF HARRIS AND JOHN CURRY





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1



La Flor Dominicana Andalusian Bull

Here is an unusual, perhaps unfamiliar cigar that gleams with distinction but doesn't have much market history, as it only came out last summer. The wrapper is a striking hue somewhere between red and brown and the beautiful shape is all curves and tapers. Salomones, as they're known in cigar factories, are far from an easy cigar to craft. Look closely at the band, which is a shade of emerald green, and you see the letters "LFD": La Flor Dominicana. The cigar is called the Andalusian Bull, and nothing about it is typical. But nothing about its creator, Litto Gomez is typical either. With Gomez, you'll find few of the tropes and stories typically associated with men in the tobacco business. No family history in tobacco. No Cuban lineage. No passed-down tobacco traditions. Born in Spain, but raised in Uruguay, Gomez came into the cigar industry in 1994 after a stint in the jewelry business went sour. His initial cigars were mild, but Gomez started getting the attention of premium smokers when he began producing stronger blends rolled in unusual shapes. Some will remember the El Jocko Perfecto No. 1 and all should know the wedge-shaped Chisel. Such odd shapes have become mainstays in the cigar world. Among serious smokers, the Chisel is now synonymous with La Flor Dominicana—which brings us to the Bull.

The La Flor Dominicana Andalusian Bull is a truly new concept within La Flor's portfolio of fine cigars. The size is based on that of an old cigar mold that

Gomez found in Belgium. Naming it after Andalusia was a nod to Spain, the country where Gomez was born. And the silhouette of a matador on the band represents the celebrated history of the sport of bullfighting in Andalusia. That eye-catching shade of green is similar to that found on the Andalusian flag. But there's more to decode. The font on the band is based on Pablo Picasso's handwriting—he loved to paint bulls—and the scrollwork reflects patterns found on a bullfighter's uniform.

Fittingly, with this combination of heavy-handed and subtle symbolism comes a blend that is both bold and refined (like a bull and a matador). Gomez and his son Tony collaborated on the cigar and spent a fair amount of time fine-tuning the blend. The result was a cigar as intriguing in flavor as it is in appearance. It's a combination of Corojo-seed Ecuador Habano wrapper on a blend that consists primarily of Dominican Criollo '98 tobacco, a hybrid and a bit of Pelo d'Oro too. First impressions are bold and savory with strong notes of hickory and leather. But it continues to take on a complex spiciness of saffron and cumin as well as a slight tangy note that brings the strength and spice together quite gracefully—and it only gets better with every puff.

Gomez owns the brand and company with his wife, Ines Lorenzo-Gomez. This marks the first time that La Flor Dominicana has been awarded No. 1 Cigar of the Year.

96 POINTS

MADE BY: Tabacalera La Flor S.A.

FACTORY LOCATION: Dom. Rep.

WRAPPER: Ecuador

BINDER: Dom. Rep.

FILLER: Dom. Rep.

DIMENSIONS: 6 1/2" by 64 ring

PRICE: \$15.00



LITTO GOMEZ

2

Rocky Patel Sun Grown Maduro Robusto

More than 10 years ago Rocky Patel put out a line called the Rocky Patel Sun Grown. Since then, it's become one of his staple brands, but it wasn't until last year that he decided to create a maduro version.

Unlike the original line, which is still made in Honduras, the new version is made in Nicaragua at Patel's TaviCusa factory. It's also rolled in a dark, Connecticut broadleaf wrapper. This new interpretation was dubbed the Rocky Patel Sun Grown Maduro, and the Robusto is a great representation of the full-bodied blends coming out of Nicaragua today.

The first Sun Grown was a dark cigar to begin with, but this more modern version has surpassed the original in every respect—it's darker, it's stronger and it's more complex. The cigars are also trunk-pressed, giving them an attractive appearance that hints at the bold blend of Nicaraguan tobacco under the broadleaf wrapper—and they harmonize beautifully, imparting earthy, nutty notes and bittersweet chocolate with the sweeter properties of the wrapper.

Astute observers will notice the new packaging as well. Both band and box have their own unique design to adequately give these cigars their own identity.


95 POINTS

MADE BY: Tabacalera Villa Cuba S.A.
FACTORY LOCATION: Nicaragua
WRAPPER: U.S.A./Conn. Broadleaf
BINDER: Nicaragua
FILLER: Nicaragua
DIMENSIONS: 5" by 50 ring
PRICE: \$8.60



ROCKY PATEL

3

Partagás Serie E No. 2

The fattest Partagás in the regular-production Cuban portfolio is also the best Partagás that CIGAR AFICIONADO smoked this year. At 54 ring gauge, it's clearly part of Cuba's recent initiative to make its cigars larger and fatter in general. Traditionalists might scoff at the beefed-up parameters, but it would be a mistake as Habanos has loaded this cigar with plenty of fine, complex tobacco.

The Partagás Alphabet Series dates back to the 1930s, when the brand first appeared on the British market. When it debuted, the line included Series A through D with four sizes assigned to each letter, for a total of 16 sizes. The brand was discontinued in the 1960s but brought back incrementally in subsequent years. All cigars in the letter series are dressed in a distinctive red-and-gold band that separates them from the core Cuban Partagás cigar line. For years, fans of the Partagás letter series only had the Serie D No. 4 to enjoy, but Habanos has taken a new interest in the Partagás sub-brand and added a number of new sizes over the last few years. The Serie E No. 2 was released in 2011, but the samples with a box date of August 2016 mark the most impressive Cuban of the year.


94 POINTS

MADE BY: N/A
FACTORY LOCATION: Cuba
WRAPPER: Cuba
BINDER: Cuba
FILLER: Cuba
DIMENSIONS: 5 1/2" by 54 ring
PRICE: £26.78



HABANOS S.A.

4

E.P. Carrillo Selección Oscuro Piramides Royal

As a cigar-maker who has pretty much done it all, Ernesto Perez-Carrillo has little to prove. He started as a true boutique operation in Little Havana, then became nationally recognized, before eventually selling his operation to one of the biggest cigar companies in the world. After that, he started all over again. So what can someone like Perez-Carrillo give the cigar world that he hasn't already? The answer is the E.P. Carrillo Selección Oscuro Piramides Royal. It's dark and imposing, but don't let that scare you. The blend isn't as aggressive as one might think. While it's certainly full of assertive character, it's nuanced as well. This effect is produced by the creative blending of Mexican wrapper, Ecuadoran binder and Nicaraguan filler. Perez-Carrillo is always playing with different tobaccos and experimenting with blends, and he has the means to do so. He owns the Tabacalera La Alianza factory in the Dominican Republic and is very involved in the sourcing and blending of his tobacco. This cigar is not only full of dried-fruit notes and a chocolate-covered raisin sweetness, but is an exercise in restraint and balance. Perez-Carrillo has redesigned the band, which you will see in our online video, but there are still cigars in the market with the original band, like the one shown here.



94 POINTS

MADE BY: Tabacalera La Alianza S.A.
FACTORY LOCATION: Dom. Rep.
WRAPPER: Mexico
BINDER: Ecuador
FILLER: Nicaragua
DIMENSIONS: 6" by 52 ring
PRICE: \$8.25



ERNESTO PEREZ-CARRILLO

5

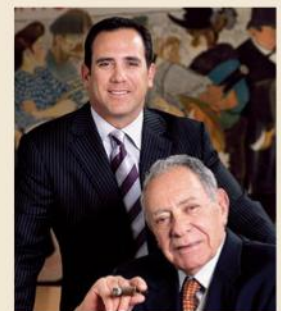
Padrón Serie 1926 No. 90 (Natural)

Whether it be an anniversary or an important benchmark, it seems that the Padrón family is always celebrating something. And when they do, smokers end up with a great new cigar. The Padrón Serie 1926 No. 90 is a perfect example. It celebrates the life of company patriarch José Orlando Padrón, who turned 90 in June and is still active in the company he founded. The cigar is Padrón in almost every way—it's dark (even this natural version), it's rich and it leaves the familiar bold impressions of cocoa, earth and coffee on the palate in the way that only a Padrón cigar can. But it's unlike other Padróns due to its shape. All other cigars in the Padrón Serie 1926 line are squarely pressed, giving the line its signature look. Not true of the No. 90. This one is in the round. It also comes packaged in a glossy tubo—another first for the company. If you're unfamiliar with José Orlando Padrón's history, you should know this: the man has paid his dues. Over his storied career, he's had his offices in Miami bombed, his factory in Nicaragua burned to the ground and even a tobacco warehouse set ablaze. Despite this, he persevered and created some of the best cigars the world has ever seen.



94 POINTS

MADE BY: Tabacos Cubanica S.A.
FACTORY LOCATION: Nicaragua
WRAPPER: Nicaragua
BINDER: Nicaragua
FILLER: Nicaragua
DIMENSIONS: 5 1/2" by 52 ring
PRICE: \$19.50



JORGE & JOSÉ O. PADRÓN

6

Arturo Fuente Rosado Sungrown Magnum R Vitola "Forty-Four"



The name is certainly long, but it tells you almost everything you need to know about this Fuente cigar. Rosado Sungrown indicates the color and growing conditions of the wrapper leaf. And Magnum refers to the sizes of the cigars in the line. When the brand was first released, all the cigars were fairly thick. But more importantly, this cigar also ran contrary to the industry trend. At the time, many manufacturers in the premium sector were releasing strong, full-bodied cigars. Carlos "Carlito" Fuente Jr. decided to go in the opposite direction and made a cigar that was medium bodied in strength, but still registered as full-flavored on the palate—not an easy task. He accomplished this by creating a particular blend of Dominican tobaccos and pairing it with a wrapper leaf from Ecuador that, according to Fuente, has almost a decade of age. You might assume the cigar is called Vitola "Forty-Four" for its ring gauge, but the "Forty-Four" denotes the number of cigars packaged per box. This cigar is still fairly slim at 47 ring, but it's a great size, and each puff compels the next with unrelenting layers of spicy cinnamon, dried fruit, nuts and maple.

94 POINTS

MADE BY: Tabacalera A. Fuente y Cia.
FACTORY LOCATION: Dom. Rep.
WRAPPER: Ecuador
BINDER: Dom. Rep.
FILLER: Dom. Rep.
DIMENSIONS: 4 7/8" by 47 ring
PRICE: \$8.15



CARLOS FUENTE JR.

7

Norteño Robusto Grande



The packaging of this brand is not only attractive, but a foreshadowing of the cigars inside—dark, flat and compact. That's a fair way to describe the appearance of the Norteño Robusto Grande. What the packaging doesn't tell you is that each cigar in the box has a lush, substantial draw that layers the palate with copious amounts of dense smoke. The combustion and performance are exemplary. Norteños come off the tables of La Gran Fabrica Drew Estate and from the mind of Willy Herrera, Drew Estate's master blender. He took a Mexican San Andrés wrapper, a Honduran binder and integrated the two with a filler blend of well-aged Nicaraguan tobaccos. Great construction, however, is not the only hallmark of this cigar. It's also rich with notes of raw cocoa bean, refined milk chocolate and nougat, yet maintains its earthy qualities without becoming too sweet. The name, which translates to "northerner" in Spanish refers to those in Estelí, which is located in the northern part of Nicaragua and where the Drew Estate factory resides. It's also a nod to Herrera himself, who is from Miami. He may be considered from the south in the United States, but in Nicaragua, he's a northerner.

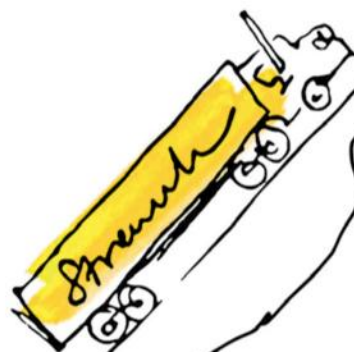
94 POINTS

MADE BY: Gran Fabrica Drew Estate
FACTORY LOCATION: Nicaragua
WRAPPER: Mexico
BINDER: Honduras
FILLER: Nicaragua
DIMENSIONS: 5 1/2" by 54 ring
PRICE: \$12.00



WILLY HERRERA

You don't withstand
sub-zero temperatures,
risk your life on icy roads,
use mountain snowmelt water,
and rely on volunteers for bottling,
all to make an average whiskey.



Stranahan's

ROCKY MOUNTAIN SINGLE MALT

Founded by Jess Graber in 2002, Stranahan's is Colorado's first legal distillery since Prohibition. Made in Denver at 5,251 feet, our whiskey is double-distilled from barley and aged in new American white oak barrels. Darn high up.



8

Oliva Serie V Melanio Robusto

Many will remember that the Oliva Serie V Melanio Figurado was named Cigar of the Year in 2014. The brand continues its trajectory of excellence with the Robusto. It's a far more compact format, and perhaps more approachable, as not everyone is inclined to light up a large double figurado as their everyday smoke. The blend is centered around a Sumatra-seed wrapper grown in Ecuador paired with Nicaraguan tobacco. This combination isn't terribly common in the premium cigar world, but the Oliva Cigar Co. seems to understand the tobaccos and how they fit together for harmony and balance. Earlier in 2016, Oliva Cigar Co. was acquired by J. Cortez Cigars N.V., a Belgian tobacco company that wanted a premium cigar operation in its portfolio. Now they have one. Assurances have been made that nothing will change under the new ownership, and that J. Cortez will maintain Oliva's high standards. We certainly hope so. With the Oliva Serie V Melanio, they now have an extraordinary cigar blend on their hands. The smoke is silky, sweet and, at times intense with toast and cedar. The brand name commemorates Melanio Oliva, who first grew tobacco in Cuba in the 1800s.


94 POINTS

MADE BY: Tabacalera Oliva S.A.
FACTORY LOCATION: Nicaragua
WRAPPER: Ecuador
BINDER: Nicaragua
FILLER: Nicaragua
DIMENSIONS: 5" by 52 ring
PRICE: \$9.74



JOSÉ OLIVA

9

Hoyo de Monterrey Epicure No. 2

If there is a quintessential Cuban robusto, the Hoyo de Monterrey Epicure No. 2 probably holds that title. The size has been around for decades and is a favorite among fans of Cuban cigars for its delicate nuance, complexity and aroma. Not that this is a mild cigar. Subtlety and mild body aren't exactly the same thing, and the Epicure No. 2 is a case study in how a cigar can deliver layers of flavor while preserving delicacy and sophistication. The samples we smoked were from a February 2016 production date. Traditionalists should be happy that not too much has changed in terms of presentation over the years. The Hoyo Epicure No. 2 cigars still come packaged in wooden slide-lid cabinets, which are ideal for air-flow during long-term aging. They still come bundled with a ribbon, and the cigars are even offered in 50-count cabinets as an option to standard boxes of 25. The only major change has been the bands. Up until about 10 years ago, many cigars in wooden cabinets were packaged nude. Habanos S.A. changed that by putting bands on all cigars, cabinet or otherwise. Those who wish to pay homage to the past can simply remove the labels with ease.


93 POINTS

MADE BY: N/A
FACTORY LOCATION: Cuba
WRAPPER: Cuba
BINDER: Cuba
FILLER: Cuba
DIMENSIONS: 4 7/8" by 50 ring
PRICE: £16.95



HABANOS S.A.

10

Punch Gran Puro Santa Rita



Consider the Punch Gran Puro Santa Rita a love letter to Honduras. It is composed of Honduran tobacco, made in Honduras and serves as a good example of how vibrant Honduran smokes can be. General Cigar Co. which manufactures this brand at its STG Danlí factory, grows a proprietary tobacco in the San Agustín area of Honduras near the Guatemala border, so this blend is a very quaint expression of a region-specific terroir. And with a suggested retail price of \$5.29 (before local taxes), it's also a phenomenal bargain. Punch is a heritage cigar that's been in General's possession since 1997. While it parallels Cuba's Punch brand, these non-Cuban versions are only sold in the United States. This isn't the first time that the Punch Gran Puro Santa Rita has been on the CIGAR AFICIONADO Top 25 list—it made an appearance back in 2012. Over the last four years, the price increases have been minimal yet the quality has remained quite high. The brand debuted in 2003 when the demand for strong, full-bodied cigars had yet to reach its potential. Perhaps it was ahead of its time. It's certainly the most powerful of the Punches in General's portfolio.

To watch videos of the editors smoking the best cigars of the year, visit top25.CigarAficionado.com

93 POINTS

MADE BY: Scandinavian Tobacco

Group, Danlí

FACTORY LOCATION: Honduras

WRAPPER: Honduras

BINDER: Honduras

FILLER: Honduras

DIMENSIONS: 4 1/2" by 52 ring

PRICE: \$5.29



JHONY DIAZ

TOP 25 AT A GLANCE

1	La Flor Dominicana Andalusian Bull	Dom. Rep.	\$15.00	6 1/2" by 64 ring	96
2	Rocky Patel Sun Grown Maduro Robusto	Nicaragua	\$8.60	5" by 50 ring	95
3	Partagás Serie E No. 2	Cuba	£26.78	5 1/2" by 54 ring	94
4	E.P. Carrillo Selección Oscuro Piramides Royal	Dom. Rep.	\$8.25	6" by 52 ring	94
5	Padrón Serie 1926 No. 90 (Natural)	Nicaragua	\$19.50	5 1/2" by 52 ring	94
6	Arturo Fuente Rosado SG Magnum R Vitola "Forty-Four"	Dom. Rep.	\$8.15	4 7/8" by 47 ring	94
7	Norteño Robusto Grande	Nicaragua	\$12.00	5 1/2" by 54 ring	94
8	Oliva Serie V Melanio Robusto	Nicaragua	\$9.74	5" by 52 ring	94
9	Hoyo de Monterrey Epicure No. 2	Cuba	£16.95	4 7/8" by 50 ring	93
10	Punch Gran Puro Santa Rita	Honduras	\$5.29	4 1/2" by 52 ring	93
11	Casa Fernandez Miami Aganorsa Leaf Mad. Robusto Extra	U.S.A.	\$9.00	5" by 54 ring	93
12	Casa Turrent Serie 1901 Robusto	Mexico	\$8.50	5 1/4" by 50 ring	93
13	La Aroma de Cuba Mi Amor Belicoso	Nicaragua	\$8.25	5 1/2" by 54 ring	93
14	Aging Room Small Batch M356ii Mezzo	Dom. Rep.	\$9.32	6" by 54 ring	93
15	CroMagnon Anthropology	Nicaragua	\$7.50	5 3/4" by 46 ring	93
16	El Centurion H-2K-CT Toro Box Pressed	Nicaragua	\$8.10	6" by 52 ring	93
17	Brick House Corona Larga	Nicaragua	\$5.55	6 1/4" by 46 ring	93
18	Alec Bradley Coyoil Petit Lancero	Honduras	\$6.95	6 1/2" by 41 ring	93
19	Cohiba Siglo VI (Tubo)	Cuba	£35.16	5 7/8" by 52 ring	93
20	Enclave Churchill	Nicaragua	\$6.70	7" by 52 ring	92
21	Villiger San'Doro Colorado Robusto	Nicaragua	\$8.00	5" by 50 ring	92
22	Henry Clay Stalk Cut Toro	Dom. Rep.	\$8.50	6" by 54 ring	92
23	Casa Cuba Doble Cinco	Dom. Rep.	\$11.90	5" by 50 ring	92
24	Illusione mk	Nicaragua	\$7.95	5 1/8" by 42 ring	92
25	El Güegüense Corona Gorda	Nicaragua	\$9.90	5 5/8" by 46 ring	92

11



Casa Fernandez Miami Aganorsa Leaf Maduro Robusto Extra

For many years, the name Aganorsa was known only to those in the tobacco industry. Aganorsa is an agricultural conglomerate and one of the largest growers and suppliers of Nicaraguan tobacco for the premium industry. The company is owned by Eduardo Fernández who started the Casa Fernandez and Casa Fernandez Miami brands. When it first came to market, Casa Fernandez was produced in Honduras. Years later, production was

moved to Miami. The Casa Fernandez Miami Aganorsa Leaf brand was born in 2012. Fernández is able to supply the tobacco from his own company directly to these cigars, which are box-pressed and covered in a Mexican San Andrés wrapper, the only component that Fernández doesn't grow. Many companies use Aganorsa tobacco, but in this brand, and particularly this Robusto Extra size, the tobacco shows its own distinct style.

93 POINTS

MADE BY: Casa Fernandez Miami
FACTORY LOCATION: U.S.A.
WRAPPER: Mexico
BINDER: Nicaragua
FILLER: Nicaragua
DIMENSIONS: 5" by 54 ring
PRICE: \$9.00

12



Casa Turrent Serie 1901 Robusto

The top growers of Mexican San Andrés wrapper leaf also produce an outstanding cigar—the Casa Turrent Serie 1901. It's named after the Turrent family, prolific producers of Mexican tobacco and creators of the Te-Amo brand, a value-cigar. Previous attempts by the Turrents to break into the upper echelons of the premium sector weren't terribly successful. That's changed. The Casa Turrent Serie 1901 launched on

the international market in 2013, but didn't arrive in the U.S. until August 2015. Casa Turrent is the only cigar brand that carries the Turrent name in its title (in 2014, brand owner Alejandro Turrent discontinued all his other Turrent-branded lines). He aims to position Casa Turrent as his company's flagship premium brand. Judging by the performance of the Casa Turrent 1901 Robusto, he seems well on his way.

93 POINTS

MADE BY: Casa Turrent
FACTORY LOCATION: Mexico
WRAPPER: Mexico
BINDER: Nicaragua, Mexico
FILLER: Nicaragua, Mexico
DIMENSIONS: 5 1/4" by 50 ring
PRICE: \$8.50

13



La Aroma de Cuba Mi Amor Belicoso

The La Aroma de Cuba brand was put on the market by Ashton Distributors Inc. in late 2002. At the time, the cigars were made in Honduras. A few years later, production halted and the brand was in a temporary transitional phase. Today, La Aroma de Cubas are produced in Nicaragua at My Father Cigars. The brand is still owned by Ashton, but the company has expanded the La Aroma line by many degrees. Of all its different versions and

extensions, Mi Amor has been a perennial high-performer within the pages of this magazine. The combination of dark, Mexican San Andrés wrapper with Nicaraguan filler has made it a go-to for fans of Nicaraguan cigars. The price is also attractive. Since the beginning, La Aroma de Cuba has promised to deliver the premium experience at a very reasonable price. This was Ashton's vision for the brand, and the company has kept its word.

93 POINTS

MADE BY: My Father Cigars S.A.
FACTORY LOCATION: Nicaragua
WRAPPER: Mexico
BINDER: Nicaragua
FILLER: Nicaragua
DIMENSIONS: 5 1/2" by 54 ring
PRICE: \$8.25

The Jura logo is written in a stylized, red, cursive font.

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not capsuled.

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world record holder of
Grand Slam wins, greatest
tennis player of all time –
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14



Aging Room Small Batch M356ii Mezzo

To understand the Aging Room Small Batch M356ii Mezzo, one must first look at the company's concept. Boutique Blends Cigars does not use the term "small batch" lightly. When brand owner Rafael Nodal finds a particular batch of tobacco, he creates only a finite amount of cigars. After the tobacco is finished, it's finished. No tobacco substitutions will be made over time to sustain the brand, no matter what the demand.

Nor does he change the blend in hopes that no one will notice. The M356 was one of his first Small Batch releases, but the tobacco ran out, so Nodal created a similar blend called M356ii. This way, consumers know they're smoking something slightly different without being misled. The Small Batch M356ii is a beautiful extension of the first blend, and the Mezzo scored 93 points for its savory, spicy qualities.

93 POINTS
MADE BY: Tabacalera Palma

FACTORY LOCATION: Dom. Rep.

WRAPPER: Dom. Rep.

BINDER: Dom. Rep.

FILLER: Dom. Rep.

DIMENSIONS: 6" by 54 ring

PRICE: \$9.32

15



CroMagnon Anthropology

This marks the first time that a CroMagnon cigar has made it to the Top 25 list. Don't let the name fool you. The brand, owned by Skip Martin and produced in Nicaragua under the company RoMa Craft Tobac, does not make primitive cigars. Martin has paired a Connecticut broadleaf wrapper with a Nicaraguan filler blend. That, in and of itself, is not very uncommon in the premium world. But he's also incorporated a

Cameroon binder, which isn't as orthodox. The result is a fairly bold smoke with earthy aspects of dark cocoa and nutty qualities that play off each other effectively. Perhaps the earth is the underlying theme here, between the character of the smoke and the anthropological motif. Named Anthropology, the relatively slim, 46 ring gauge cigar scored 93 points—a civilized smoke that evokes Cro-Magnon man.

93 POINTS
MADE BY: Nica Sueño S.A.

FACTORY LOCATION: Nicaragua

WRAPPER: U.S.A./Conn. Broadleaf

BINDER: Cameroon

FILLER: Nicaragua

DIMENSIONS: 5 3/4" by 46 ring

PRICE: \$7.50

16



El Centurion H-2K-CT Toro

It isn't quite as dark as Connecticut broadleaf, and it isn't quite as light as Connecticut shade. Lying somewhere in the middle is the El Centurion H-2K-CT Toro, an intensely flavorful cigar with an unusual hybrid wrapper. You can ask the Garcia family exactly who it is that grows the Cuban-seed wrapper on the El Centurion H-2K-CT, but they're not likely to say. We know it comes from somewhere in Connecticut,

we know it's a Havana 2000 seed hybrid and we know the wrappers are sungrown. Outside of that, the Garcias aren't talking. El Centurion started as a limited-edition release, but last year it hit the market as a full-fledged spinoff brand from the original with a different blend. The box-pressed H-2K-CT cigars are medium to full bodied and beautifully constructed at the My Father Cigars S.A. factory.

93 POINTS
MADE BY: My Father Cigars S.A.

FACTORY LOCATION: Nicaragua

WRAPPER: U.S.A./Conn. Habano

BINDER: Nicaragua

FILLER: Nicaragua

DIMENSIONS: 6" by 52 ring

PRICE: \$8.10

17



Brick House Corona Larga

A reminder of the last economic recession, the Brick House brand was brought to market during the tough financial times when a value-priced cigar was most welcome. But there's history to the brand. Brick House was an old cigar named after the brick house in Hungary where company founder Julius Caesar Newman lived as a child. He eventually started his own cigar company in Cleveland, Ohio in 1895 and launched

Brick House in 1937. The line was retired for decades, but resurrected in 2009. A few things have changed. Firstly, the economy has improved and secondly, it's now made in J.C. Newman's own Nicaragua factory. What hasn't changed is the value—Brick House is still a great bargain. The Corona Larga scored 93 points and retails for only \$5.55. Think of it as a recession special—even in a positive economy.

93 POINTS

MADE BY: Puros de Estelí
Nicaragua S.A. (PENSA)

FACTORY LOCATION: Nicaragua

WRAPPER: Nicaragua

BINDER: Nicaragua

FILLER: Nicaragua

DIMENSIONS: 6 1/4" by 46 ring

PRICE: \$5.55

18



Alec Bradley Coyol Petit Lancero

In honor of a particularly fertile farm in Honduras, the Alec Bradley Coyol is named after a plantation of the same name. Brand owner Alan Rubin believes that the Coyol farm produces tobacco of distinction and found a way to incorporate its leaves into a tasty, dynamic blend that stays interesting with every puff. There are elements of Coyol tobacco in each part of the cigar. The wrapper is from Coyol, as is one of the binders

and part of the filler. It makes sense that the Petit Lancero performed so well. The slim dimensions naturally emphasize the wrapper and give the smoker more of an estate tobacco experience, as opposed to merely a regional one. It's a great combination of Honduran and Nicaraguan tobacco, and scored 93 points for delivering an exquisite smoke. It's also the ideal cigar for those left who still enjoy slim sizes.

93 POINTS

MADE BY: Fabrica de Tabacos
Raices Cubanas S. de R. L.

FACTORY LOCATION: Honduras

WRAPPER: Honduras

BINDER: Honduras, Nicaragua

FILLER: Honduras, Nicaragua

DIMENSIONS: 6 1/2" by 41 ring

PRICE: \$6.95

19



Cohiba Siglo VI (Tubo)

There are a lot of "firsts" surrounding the Cohiba Siglo VI. It was the first addition to the Linea 1492 (or Siglo Series) since the brand was released. It was the first Cohiba in a tube. It was the first tube with the two-part, pull-cap design to come out of Cuba. It was the first Cohiba to exceed a ring gauge of 50. And it was also the first Cohiba to be on CIGAR AFICIONADO's Top 25 list, making its inaugural appearance for the best cigars

of 2004. Despite the long list of firsts, the Siglo VI is also a fantastic cigar. Many are made at El Laguito, which is Cohiba's mother factory, and even though the ring gauge is fairly heavy, Siglo VI cigars only have half a leaf of ligero tobacco in the blend, so the smoke has body, but isn't too powerful. Balance in blending is a difficult act, but necessary, especially with Cohiba—probably the most famous cigar name in the world.

93 POINTS

MADE BY: N/A

FACTORY LOCATION: Cuba

WRAPPER: Cuba

BINDER: Cuba

FILLER: Cuba

DIMENSIONS: 5 7/8" by 52 ring

PRICE: £35.16

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BEST CIGAR BUYS OF THE YEAR

Life seems to get more and more expensive each year, so it's comforting to know that you can still get a highly rated, handmade cigar for only a few bucks. In 2016 we rated nearly 50 smokes that scored 88 points or higher but cost \$6 or less (before taxes). Our list includes offerings from the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Nicaragua, Cuba—even two of our Top 25 cigars. They come in a range of shapes and sizes, with a considerable number of familiar brand names. And while some of these cigars are small, like the 4-inch-long Arturo Fuente Short Story, there are a few large Churchills that made the grade, two from Alec Bradley Cigars and one from Oliva Cigar Co. Cigar fans on a budget, take notice: affordable luxury is alive and well. —David Clough

93 POINTS

Brick House Corona Larga
Nicaragua • 6 1/4" by 46 ring • \$5.55

Punch Gran Puro Santa Rita
Honduras • 4 1/2" by 52 ring • \$5.29

91 POINTS

Arturo Fuente Hemingway Short Story Maduro
Dom. Rep. • 4" by 49 ring • \$5.60

La Libertad Churchill
Dom. Rep. • 6 1/2" by 50 ring • \$6.00

Oliva Serie O No. 4
Nicaragua • 5" by 43 ring • \$5.36

Padilla La Pilar Robusto
Honduras • 5" by 54 ring • \$5.50

Saint Luis Rey Belicoso
Honduras • 6 1/8" by 52 ring • \$5.48

90 POINTS

CAO Pilón Corona
Nicaragua • 5 1/2" by 44 ring • \$5.99

Casa Magna Colorado Pikito
Nicaragua • 4 3/4" by 42 ring • \$5.40

Fonseca Nicaragua Toro
Nicaragua • 6" by 50 ring • \$5.99

Heat Corojo by J. Fuego Robusto
Honduras • 5" by 50 ring • \$5.50

Joya de Nicaragua Antaño 1970 Machito
Nicaragua • 4 3/4" by 42 ring • \$5.40

Nica Rustica Short Robusto
Nicaragua • 4 1/2" by 50 ring • \$5.95

Oliva Serie G Maduro Belicoso
Nicaragua • 5" by 52 ring • \$5.93

Padrón 2000
Nicaragua • 5" by 50 ring • \$5.50

Punch London Club
Honduras • 5" by 40 ring • \$2.89

89 POINTS

7-20-4 Hustler Series Dog Walker
Honduras • 4 1/4" by 40 ring • \$6.00

Alec Bradley American Classic Blend Churchill
Nicaragua • 7" by 48 ring • \$5.90

Alec Bradley American Sun Grown Blend Churchill
Nicaragua • 7" by 48 • \$5.90

Asylum Premium 44x4
Nicaragua • 4" by 44 ring • \$5.76

H. Upmann Vintage Cameroon Petite Corona
Dom. Rep. • 5" by 40 ring • \$5.70

H. Upmann Vintage Cameroon Lonsdale
Dom. Rep. • 6 5/8" by 44 ring • \$5.81

Joya de Nicaragua Antaño Dark Corojo Peligroso
Nicaragua • 5" by 44 ring • \$5.40

Joya Red Robusto
Nicaragua • 5 1/4" by 50 ring • \$5.75

Nat Sherman Metropolitan Selection Habano Short Robusto
Dom. Rep. • 4 1/2" by 54 ring • \$5.50

Oliva Serie G Maduro Robusto
Nicaragua • 4 1/2" by 50 ring • \$5.56

Padilla Connecticut Short Robusto
Nicaragua • 4 1/4" by 60 ring • \$6.00

Padilla Corojo '99 Robusto
Honduras • 5" by 54 ring • \$6.00

Perdomo Small Batch Series Sun Grown Half Corona
Nicaragua • 4" by 46 ring • \$5.00

Romeo y Julieta Reserve Corona
Honduras • 5 5/8" by 45 ring • \$5.89

Vegueros Mañanita
Cuba • 4" by 46 ring • 3.70 Euro (\$4)

Viva Republica Advanced Warfare Petit Corona
Dom. Rep. • 4" by 41 • \$5.00

88 POINTS

Arturo Fuente Cuban Corona Maduro
Dom. Rep. • 5 1/4" by 45 ring • \$5.65

Arturo Fuente Petit Corona
Dom. Rep. • 5" by 38 • \$5.65

Brick House Robusto
Nicaragua • 5" by 54 ring • \$5.75

Fonseca Nicaragua Petit Corona
Nicaragua • 5" by 42 ring • \$4.99

Fonseca Nicaragua Robusto
Nicaragua • 5 1/2" by 54 ring • \$5.79

Kristoff Cameroon Matador
Dom. Rep. • 6 1/2" by 56 ring • \$5.08

Last Call by A.J. Fernandez Geniales
Nicaragua • 4 1/2" by 48 ring • \$5.00

Macanudo Cru Royale Poco Gordo
Dom. Rep. • 4" by 60 ring • \$5.49

Nat Sherman Metropolitan Selection Habano Robusto Fino
Dom. Rep. • 5" by 46 ring • \$5.00

New World Connecticut Corona Gorda
Nicaragua • 5 1/2" by 46 ring • \$5.50

New World Connecticut Robusto
Nicaragua • 5" by 50 ring • \$6.00

Neya F8 Patriot
Nicaragua • 5" by 52 ring • \$6.00

Oliva Connecticut Reserve Petit Corona
Nicaragua • 4" by 38 ring • \$4.93

Oliva Serie G Churchill
Nicaragua • 7" by 50 ring • \$5.84

Perdomo Small Batch Series Sun Grown Rothschild
Nicaragua • 4 1/2" by 50 ring • \$6.00

Room101 The Big Payback Connecticut Chavala
Honduras • 5" by 50 ring • \$5.90





JEFF HARRIS

Top-rated cigars that won't break the bank.
At left, from bottom, the Neya F8,
7-20-4 Hustler Series and Nat Sherman
Metropolitan Selection Habano.
Above, top to bottom: Padilla La Pilar
(on its box), Fonseca Nicaragua and
Alec Bradley American Sun Grown Blend.

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PETE JOHNSON
TATUAJE

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20



Enclave Churchill

Though A.J. Fernandez is a familiar name among cigar smokers, few realize that A.J. is part of a father-and-son team. He relies on his father, Ismael, to help run his huge operation, and Ismael is often instrumental in the blending process. Enclave is a cigar brand that Ismael created, so it's no surprise that the cigar is a little more old-fashioned, focusing less on strength, and more on flavor. Heavy-handed power is a modern trait of the

premium market, but Ismael toned it down for the Enclave. The cigar is impeccably constructed, as are most cigars that come out of the busy A.J. Fernandez factory in Nicaragua. The pristine wrapper is beautiful to behold and the combustion is flawless. So is the draw. Each puff is a clear reminder that this cigar favors finesse over force. The classic Churchill format is an additional nod to tradition.

92 POINTS

MADE BY: Tabacalera A.J. Fernandez
Cigars de Nicaragua

FACTORY LOCATION: Nicaragua

WRAPPER: Ecuador

BINDER: Cameroon

FILLER: Nicaragua

DIMENSIONS: 7" by 52 ring

PRICE: \$6.70

21



Villiger San'Doro Colorado Robusto

Villiger is a company with a long tobacco history that dates back to the 1800s. The company's history in the premium sector, however, isn't quite as long—closer to 10 years. The company is based in Switzerland, and its premium products are distributed through Villiger Cigars North America, with the U.S. as its primary market. Efforts to infiltrate the high-end sector have resulted in an entire portfolio, and the most memorable

is the Villiger San'Doro Colorado. The name pays homage to tobacco lore. According to Villiger, when Christopher Columbus brought tobacco back to Europe, it was referred to as the holy or sacred plant of India, also called San'Doro. The Ecuadoran and Nicaraguan tobaccos in this blend pair beautifully, and the San'Doro is a fine addition to the premium cigar world—even if it took Villiger more than a century to get there.

92 POINTS

MADE BY: Tabacalera Oliva S.A.

FACTORY LOCATION: Nicaragua

WRAPPER: Ecuador

BINDER: Nicaragua

FILLER: Nicaragua

DIMENSIONS: 5" by 50 ring

PRICE: \$8.00

22



Henry Clay Stalk Cut Toro

Altadis U.S.A. has revitalized this once sleepy cigar line, bestowing new packaging and a great blend on the heritage line. It started when Altadis collaborated with Tatuaje to make a one-off project called Henry Clay Tattoo. This sparked new interest in Henry Clay and Altadis took advantage of the buzz by creating the Henry Clay Stalk Cut. The name refers to the harvesting method for the aged broadleaf wrapper found on

this cigar. Stalk cutting is the process in which the entire broadleaf tobacco plant is chopped at the base and hung by its stalk to cure in a barn. Altadis says that the wrapper is from a 2012 harvest and has vintage dated all the tobacco in the blend. The Dominican components are from 2012, the Nicaraguan tobacco from 2013. Each rich, ripe cigar is box pressed and rustically finished with an uncut foot.

92 POINTS

MADE BY: Tabacalera de Garcia

FACTORY LOCATION: Dom. Rep.

WRAPPER: U.S.A./Conn. Broadleaf

BINDER: Dom. Rep.

FILLER: Dom. Rep., Nicaragua

DIMENSIONS: 6" by 54 ring

PRICE: \$8.50

23



Casa Cuba Doble Cinco

Carlos “Carlito” Fuente is not only the president of A. Fuente y Cia., but also does most of the blending. For the Casa Cuba, he turned the blending over to his father, Carlos Fuente Sr., who died in August 2016. The blend, released in 2013, was the first cigar that the company patriarch had put together in decades. Fuente Sr. blended Casa Cuba using Ecuador Havana wrappers and a mix of Cuban-seed Dominican filler and binder.

With this brand, Fuente Sr. aimed to recreate a taste of his early days in the cigar business when Cuban leaf was legally imported into the U.S. “I blended this cigar the way I used to blend Cuban tobacco,” he said. The name Doble Cinco, is a reference to the game of dominos. Though fairly mild, this blend is full of life and character, and, more importantly could be regarded as a window to another era in cigar making.

92 POINTS

MADE BY: Tabacalera A. Fuente y Cia.

FACTORY LOCATION: Dom. Rep.

WRAPPER: Ecuador

BINDER: Dom. Rep.

FILLER: Dom. Rep.

DIMENSIONS: 5" by 50 ring

PRICE: \$11.90

24



Illusione mk

It's a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma. And also a bit of fun. Many of Illusione cigars have hidden meanings encoded in the packaging and in the names. The “mk” printed on the black-and-white Illusione band, for example, stands for “mind kontrol.” Brand owner Dion Giolito believes that the corona size, such as this one, serves as the best blending format when creating a cigar due to its proportions and ratios

of tobacco. He who produces the best corona, his thinking goes, is the one who “kontrols” the market. If you're not one to mix riddles with your cigars, the data on this smoke is pretty straightforward. It's made in Nicaragua at the TABSA factory and is full of fantastic Nicaraguan tobacco. Substantial flavors of coffee and spice lead to a sweet note on the palate. For such a little cigar, the Illusione mk imparts big character.

92 POINTS

MADE BY: Tabacos Valle de Jalapa S.A. (TABSA)

FACTORY LOCATION: Nicaragua

WRAPPER: Nicaragua

BINDER: Nicaragua

FILLER: Nicaragua

DIMENSIONS: 5 1/8" by 42 ring

PRICE: \$7.95

25



El Güegüense Corona Gorda

Based on Nicaraguan folklore, El Güegüense translates to “the wise man,” and is the debut brand from Foundation Cigar Co., a company launched in mid-2015 by cigarmaker Nicholas Melillo. He was perhaps best known in the industry for running production at La Gran Fabrica Drew Estate in Nicaragua, but Melillo has developed a fast and loyal following with this cigar line since he branched out on his own.

This Nicaraguan puro has a Corojo 99 wrapper, Corojo '99 binder and fillers composed of Corojo '99 and Criollo '98 from Jalapa and Estelí. Melillo says that the filler leaves were harvested in 2011 and 2012. The combination of different varietals from different regions make this an interesting, tasty mélange of Nicaraguan tobacco. Thankfully, the El Güegüense Corona Gorda is a lot easier to smoke than it is to pronounce.

92 POINTS

MADE BY: Tabacos Valle de Jalapa S.A. (TABSA)

FACTORY LOCATION: Nicaragua

WRAPPER: Nicaragua

BINDER: Nicaragua

FILLER: Nicaragua

DIMENSIONS: 5 5/8" by 46 ring

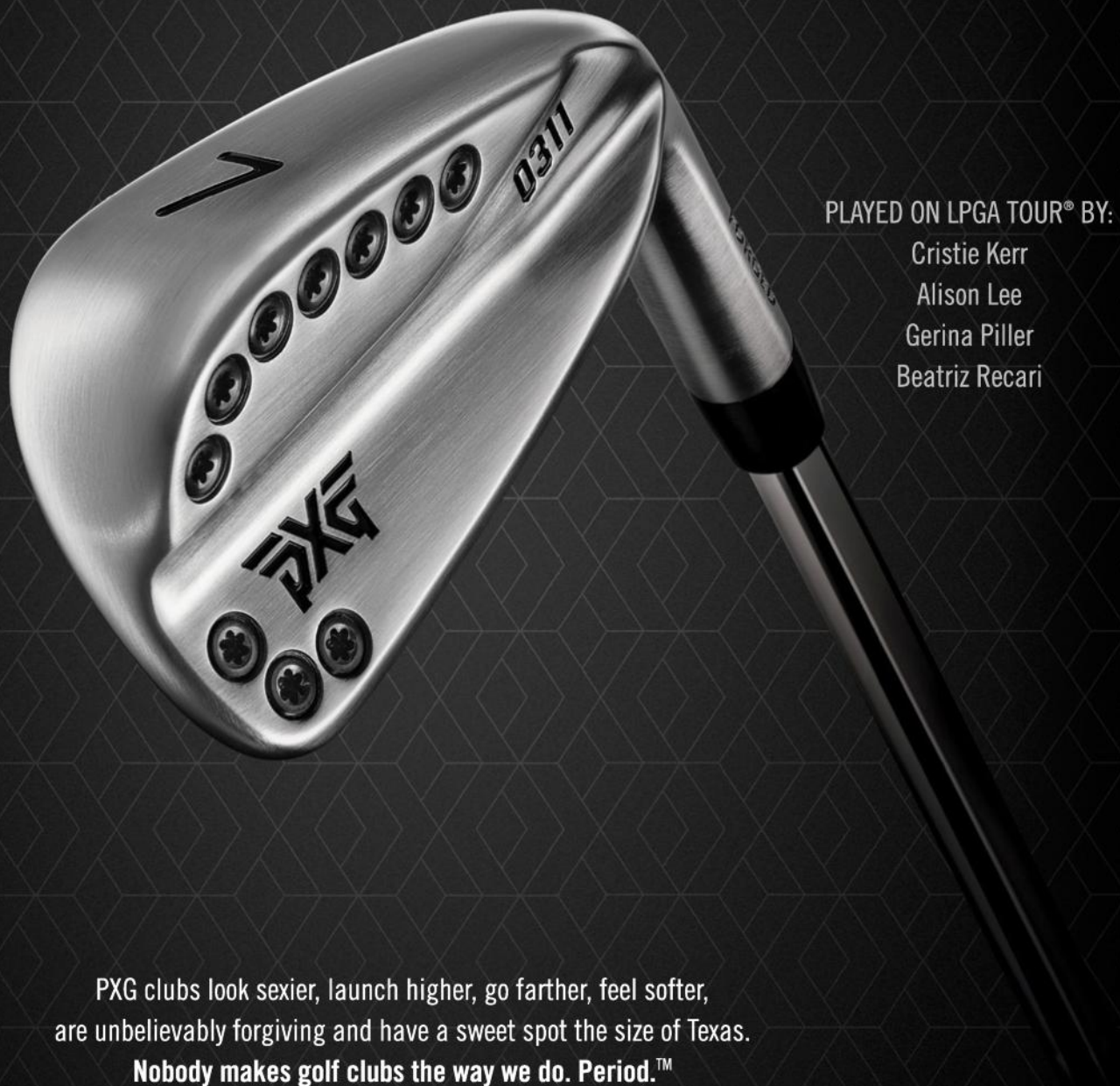
PRICE: \$9.90

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NEW RELEASES OF 2016

Asylum 13 Connecticut An offshoot of Asylum 13 made with an Ecuadoran Connecticut-seed wrapper over tobaccos from Honduras.

Aurora Preferidos Double Barrel Aged The tobaccos in this limited cigar were aged inside rum barrels for three years, rolled into a perfecto and then aged some more inside those same barrels.

Bellas Artes Made by A.J. Fernandez, each of the sizes in this line are box pressed and covered in a wrapper referred to as "Rojita," a hybrid of Connecticut, Corojo '99 and Havana 2000 tobacco.

Big Papi Tabacalera El Artista teamed up with former Boston Red Sox slugger David Ortiz to create a limited, one-size cigar.

The Caelenoch 50 Part of the filler of this 6-inch-by-50-ring gauge cigar is rolled using tobacco cured with smoke from imported Scottish peat.

Casa Cuba Divine Inspiration This new size was the final cigar blend from legendary cigarmaker Carlos Fuente Sr.

Casa Turrent Serie 1941 Celebrating the birth year of Alberto Turrent, this brand comes in three box-pressed sizes and is wrapped in dark Mexican tobacco.

Charter Oak An homage to the cigarmaker's home state of Connecticut, this cigar is available in two different wrapper types, Connecticut shade and Connecticut broadleaf.

Cornelius & Anthony Vengaza It means "vengeance" in Spanish, and the gun on the box is indicative of its bold, spicy blend.

Davidoff Yamasá A Dominican wrapper and binder from the growing region of Yamasá anchors this new smoke, which is bolstered with a hearty blend of Dominican and Nicaraguan tobaccos.

Diamond Crown Black Diamond J.C. Newman and Fuente teamed up to make a darker Diamond Crown with Connecticut Havana wrapper.

El Trovador From PDR Cigars, this new line comes in four sizes, each box pressed and wrapped in an attractive wrapper that brand owner Abe Flores called Ecuadoran Rosado.

Espinosa Crema The first Espinosa branded cigar from La Zona Cigars to have a light, Connecticut-style wrapper comes in three sizes.

Flor de las Antillas Maduro The successor to the My Father brand that won Cigar of the Year in 2012 has a darker wrapper and a modified blend.

Fonseca Nicaragua The first-ever Fonseca made in Nicaragua features tobaccos from Esteli and Ometepe, a volcanic island in Lake Nicaragua.

Guardian Of The Farm This collaboration between Warped Cigars and TABSA is a Nicaraguan puro that comes in three sizes.

Gurkha Cellar Reserve 21 Year The latest addition to the Cellar Reserve series wears an Ecuadoran Connecticut wrapper.

Herrera Esteli Miami Drew Estate master blender Willy Herrera turned to El Titan de Bronze, his former employer, to roll this one-size line extension.

Illusione Garagiste This line is named in honor of a group of fringe winemakers in France.

Inch By E.P. Carrillo Colorado No cigar is thinner than 58 ring gauge in Ernesto Perez-Carrillo's Inch brand. Colorado is made only with leaves from the upper primings of a tobacco plant.

Kristoff Habano This cigar, which comes in three sizes, is draped in a Brazilian Habano wrapper, a Brazilian Sumatra binder and contains Cuban-seed filler.

La Flor Dominicana Salomon Único Artistic figurados made with designs and patterns cut from different wrappers, from light brown to green candela to dark maduro. No two boxes are alike.



Flor de las Antillas Maduro

La Galera 80th Anniversary Box Pressed Limited Edition All of the Dominican filler and binder tobaccos in this cigar were grown on owner José "Jochy" Blanco's Potrero Farm in the Dominican Republic.

La Palina Nicaragua Connecticut La Palina launched more than 40 new brands this year, including this cigar, the first Nicaraguan-made smoke from the company.

Macanudo Mao For this smoke, General Cigar Co. reached into its archival seed banks and regenerated an heirloom tobacco varietal said to be used in the original Macanudos from the 1960s. It comes packed in boxes of 10 in three sizes.

Midnight Express This maduro follow-up to Caldwell Cigar Co.'s lauded Eastern Standard line wears a dark, Ecuadoran Connecticut wrapper and comes in four sizes.

Montecristo 80 Aniversario Habanos S.A. originally debuted this commemorative cigar in 2015, but this pricey 6 1/2-inch-by-55 ring smoke didn't begin showing up in shops until summer of 2016.

Montecristo Pilotico Pepe Mendez A three-size line that is named for the rare tobacco rolled into its filler, a new hybrid of an old archived seed crossed with a heartier varietal to resist disease.

Nat Sherman Metropolitan Habano A bolder line extension crafted from Nicaraguan Habano wrapper and Nicaraguan binder and fillers.

Oliveros Gran Retorno Rafael Nodal has breathed new life into this once sleepy brand for a "grand return." It's been rebled and repackaged and comes in Habano and Maduro varieties, each in four sizes.

Padilla Anniversary This commemorative smoke, which celebrates Padilla Cigar Co.'s 14 years of business, wears a Honduran Habano wrapper over a Nicaraguan Corojo '99 binder and Nicaraguan fillers.

Padrón 1964 Anniversary Series Hermoso

This short, fat cigar measures 4 inches by 56 ring gauge ships in 26-count boxes and can be found in both natural and maduro varieties.

Partagas Ramon y Ramon Part of the filler in this General Cigar Co. brand is a leaf that's a cross between an heirloom tobacco seed and a newer varietal. Additionally, the unusual wrapper comes from Cameroon's Belita region.

Plasencia Alma Fuerte The Plasencias are best known for growing tobacco, but the father-and-son team introduced six new cigar brands this year, including this brawny brand with three sizes.

Rocky Patel Dark Dominican The first Rocky Patel cigar to be rolled in the Dominican Republic wears a dark Connecticut broadleaf wrapper and is billed as a medium- to full-bodied cigar.

Romeo y Julieta Capuletos Cuba added this 6-inch-by-53 ring cigar, a relatively new format that's also known by its factory vitola name Sobresalientes, to its Edición Limitada lineup.

Romeo y Julieta Reserve Rare 11 Years Old

This cigar has been aged for 11 years, retails for \$11 and only 11,000 were made. It comes in one size, 5 3/4 inches by 48 ring gauge, and is packaged in 11-count boxes.

San Cristobal Quintessence This regular-production cigar from Ashton is rolled with an Ecuadoran Habano wrapper and binder, with filler tobaccos from the Garcia family farms in Nicaragua. It comes in four sizes, packed in boxes of 24.

Tatuaje Reserva Broadleaf Collection

Pete Johnson took 10 sizes from his popular brown label line, replaced the wrappers with Connecticut Broadleaf and presented them in a stunning box.

Victor Calvo U.S. Shade Reserve Draped in a silky, light wrapper grown in Windsor, Connecticut, this three-size line is punched up with some Dominican and Nicaraguan ligero in the filler.

—Andrew Nagy

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“You’re Fired”

Arnold Schwarzenegger is set to replace Donald Trump
on NBC’s hit show “The New Celebrity Apprentice”

BY MARSHALL FINE • PORTRAITS BY JIM WRIGHT

STYLING: JANE ROSS • GROOMING: JOANNEL CLEMENTE
HAIR: ANGELA ROJAS • LOCATION: MELODY RANCH STUDIO

Arnold Schwarzenegger,
ever-present cigar in hand,
climbing into his own
personal tank in Santa
Clarita, California.



Arnold

Schwarzenegger, a cigar clamped between his jaws like a punctuation mark for his broad smile, climbs aboard a tank on a warm November afternoon. This is no movie prop, and it's not just any tank. The 46 tons of moving metal belongs to Schwarzenegger himself, the larger-than-life success story who has been everything from Conan the Barbarian to the Terminator, Governor of California to cigar-chomping icon. • Spend any time with Schwarzenegger and you quickly get the impression that this is his world. We're all just along for the ride. • "It drives as well today as it did when I was 18," he says. In his black, short-sleeved polo and black leather pants, he has a formidably

muscular presence—not quite the perfection when he was dubbed “the Austrian Oak” as a young bodybuilder, but still extremely solid, his eyes glimmering with mischief beneath a head of preternaturally brown hair, his handshake firm but not aggressive.

He lowers his six-foot-frame through a hatch into the driver seat of the intimidating mass of metal. It's an M47 Patton, named after the bombastic and brilliant American general of World War II, and it's very likely the actual tank Schwarzenegger drove when he joined the Austrian army as an 18-year-old.

“From my youngest days, I wanted to drive tanks,” Schwarzenegger says, “but when I got in the army, they told me, ‘You’re too tall.’ My father had connections and so I got to go to tank-driving school.” He presses forward, taking the beast on a rumbling spin around the property.

This is a man who gets what he wants, whether it's unmatched fame, hundreds of millions in net worth or a vehicle that can crush SUVs for breakfast. When he heard in 1991 that the Austrian military was planning to retire an old group of tanks it had received from the United States in the 1950s, Schwarzenegger began making inquiries. He located what he says is the very machine he had driven back in his youth, the number 331 still painted on its steel hull. As chairman of the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports under President George H.W. Bush, he was able to pull a few strings via the Pentagon to buy the tank—its cannon disarmed, but its engine very much intact—and have it shipped to the United States, where it eventually made its way to Melody Ranch Motion Picture Studio in Santa Clarita in the San Fernando Valley.

He drives the behemoth as often as he can, sometimes crushing things for charity, but even at the age of 69 there just isn't that much free time. Like the Terminator, Schwarzenegger never seems to quit, and his schedule would flatten a younger man. He's been filming a movie

(scheduled to hit theaters later this year) with Jackie Chan in China and he travels regularly on behalf of the USC Schwarzenegger Institute for State and Global Policy, addressing concerns about climate change and air pollution. “I make movies and commercials, I give speeches for my institute on the environment,” he says. He's hands-on with After-School All-Stars, a program designed to channel at-risk youth into productive after-school activities.

And now he has a new TV show.

Schwarzenegger is making his first foray into reality television, taking command as the mentor seeking a mentee in “The New Celebrity Apprentice.” He is stepping into the shoes of the show's long-time host, President-elect Donald Trump, who uncorked the catchphrase “You're Fired” on a regular basis. Trump's tenure as host ended in 2015, right around the time he announced his presidential campaign, but he remains an executive producer of the show, as well as one of its owners.

The new show debuts on NBC January 2, though taping was done over the course of a month in early 2016. Schwarzenegger is impatient about the lag time: “You shoot something and it comes out a year later—but you wish it would come out right away,” he says.

“I did the show for two reasons,” he says. “I loved watching it. It was a great show that always sucked me in. I thought Trump did a great job with it. When I heard he'd been discontinued, I thought, ‘There's an interesting show I could host.’”



Summer 1996

July/August 2003



Arnold Schwarzenegger takes over "The New Celebrity Apprentice" boardroom with help from nephew Patrick Knapp Schwarzenegger and star model Tyra Banks.

"I had never done a reality show and I thought it would be interesting to try. As an actor, you train yourself in the other direction. To do a show like this, there are totally different skills you have to develop, though I'm naturally fast on my feet."

This new boss had been a business success even before he made a fortune in movies. "Most people don't know that Arnold was a millionaire before he was cast in *Conan the Barbarian*," says Mark Burnett, executive producer and creator of "The Apprentice." "Arnold had massive success not only in real estate but also in professional sports, acting and politics. He shares a great deal of his experience from all of them on the show."

The new season pairs Schwarzenegger with his nephew Patrick Knapp Schwarzenegger and super model Tyra Banks, and a host of competitors, from retired athletes such as Laila Ali, Eric Dickerson and Ricky Williams, rockers like Vince Neil and Boy George and TV personalities.

"Everyone was, in one way or another, surprising," Schwarzenegger says. "It depended on what the challenge was, which people would emerge with an interesting talent or connection. When you see a UFC fighter [Chael Sonnen], who is used to fighting and beating up on everybody, and

"Most people don't know that Arnold was a millionaire before he was cast in *Conan the Barbarian*." -Mark Burnett

he's very articulate and sensitive in the way he approaches a certain subject, it surprises you. It gives you a chance to look inside these famous people."

Misleading preconception is a two-way street. "I thought he'd be a jerk, even though I'd never met him," says contestant Lisa Leslie, a three-time WNBA MVP. "But at the end, we all went to his home for a barbecue and he was gracious and humble, kind and respectful. He did say that, during the show, he turns it on when he needs to. But I found him to be a very compassionate man."

"Arnold encourages contestants to take 'big swings,'" says Burnett. "He looks at things like energy, positivity, passion and hard work in making his decisions. And he loves people. He was a great leader on the set, and the cast and crew absolutely loved him...He spent literally hundreds of hours preparing for this shoot. He really wanted to understand what

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makes this series work, and made sure that he was prepared. His passion for whatever he does is infectious; it really comes across on television.”

What makes a good boss? “Someone who is able to make people understand their vision,” Schwarzenegger says. “Someone who can articulate what’s expected, who can direct people to the ultimate goal, to bring everybody together to fight for that. You can have creativity; it’s all part of teamwork. But you have to be firm and have a clear vision. If people don’t follow you, there are consequences.”

A promo for the show features a clip of Schwarzenegger being engineered, Terminator-style. At the end, a robot arm fires up his cigar, which has become as much a part of the Schwarzenegger image as his physique, his accent or his open-faced smile. When he first appeared on the cover of this magazine in Summer 1996—he’s now the only man to appear on three CIGAR AFICIONADO covers—Schwarzenegger told the story about being introduced to his first cigar in the 1970s. Asked how many humidors he owns today, Schwarzenegger rolls his eyes.

“That’s like asking how many shoes I have,” he says. “I have some unbelievable humidors, a collection from around the world, 100 different designs. I have a lot of lighters, too. I very rarely buy a cigar because I get so many as gifts. I don’t keep that many around, maybe 200 at any given time.”

One-time box-office rival Sylvester Stallone, who Schwarzenegger joined on screen in *The Expendables* series as well as *Escape Plan* (2013), says there’s a certain fastidious quality when Schwarzenegger sits down with a cigar. “Arnold is what I would call ‘a neat smoker,’” Stallone says. “He doesn’t demolish a cigar by chomping away on it. He savors it.”

“When I worked with Arnold, he was totally into [cigars],” recalls Danny DeVito, who costarred with Schwarzenegger in the 1988 comedy smash *Twins*. “For a guy who was all about health and fitness, he was amazing. He’s a friend and it’s a cool thing smoking with a friend. You enjoy a good meal, a couple of drinks and a nice Partagás.”

Schwarzenegger can also be an unapologetic cigar smoker, as actor Jim Belushi recalled in the film *Red Heat*.

“The fucker smoked a Montecristo No. 2 in a cop car with the windows closed,” Belushi told CIGAR AFICIONADO back in 2010. “The car



filled with smoke and I got sick to my stomach. Arnold says, ‘What’s the matter, Jim? Does a little cigar smoke bother you? Here—try one.’” Belushi is now a huge cigar fan himself.

“I used to smoke the extra-long ones,” Schwarzenegger says. “I got off them because I smoke less now. Now I like smaller cigars.” Of course, for a man like Schwarzenegger, small is relative. “I like the Partagás [Serie D] No. 4,” he says, referring to Cuba’s most popular robusto. “That’s become one of my favorites. I like some of the non-Cubans, when they’re good. But I love a Cuban cigar when it’s good.”

He smokes cigars while driving his Hummer around his Brentwood neighborhood, or while playing chess sitting outside at home. But he avoids cigar bars.

"I always go outside," he says. "At my house, I have a big fireplace and sit outdoors when I smoke. I won't smoke in the house."

As governor of California from late 2003 to early 2011, Schwarzenegger couldn't smoke in his Sacramento state house. Government regulations prohibited smoking anywhere in the capitol building, including the governor's office, and smoking was prohibited within 20 feet of the building. His solution? He constructed a tent within the capitol's large, open-air atrium, with no side of the tent closer to the building than 20 feet.

"It was like having an office outside," he recalls. "I had air-conditioning pumped in. It was my meeting place where people could come and smoke stogies."

But before there is a cigar—or work—there is always working out. Early one morning, he and two pals head for the gym. They come gliding out of the dawn fog on their mountain bikes, silent and imposing: large men in workout clothes and long-sleeve jackets, rolling quietly down Santa Monica's Main Street like an advance squad for the fitness army. A few pedestrians who are out this early call his name as he rides by—"Arnold!" He smiles broadly and gives a wave of acknowledgment, but he doesn't break the pace on his daily jaunt to the Gold's Gym in Venice. Though the building itself has moved, Gold's has been Schwarzenegger's home base since he arrived in California almost 50 years ago.

"I'm addicted—I have to do it," he says. "My day cannot start without doing something physically. And I work out at night before bed: cardio, weight-training. I want to stay in shape as long as I can."

Schwarzenegger and his small posse head back into an endless series of rooms filled with weight-resistance machines and free weights. He greets old friends but walks with purpose. Despite his fame and legend, his presence here is so regular that his movement through the large facility barely stirs a ripple.

His workout is compressed but purposeful: 10 reps on one machine, then 10 reps on another, back and forth until he's done 40 on each. He then moves to the next pair of machines, alternating sets with one of his biking companions, Ralf Moeller, a 6-foot-6 actor and retired bodybuilder who towers over Schwarzenegger like a joshing younger brother.

"You know," Moeller confides, "between Arnold and me, we have 14 titles."

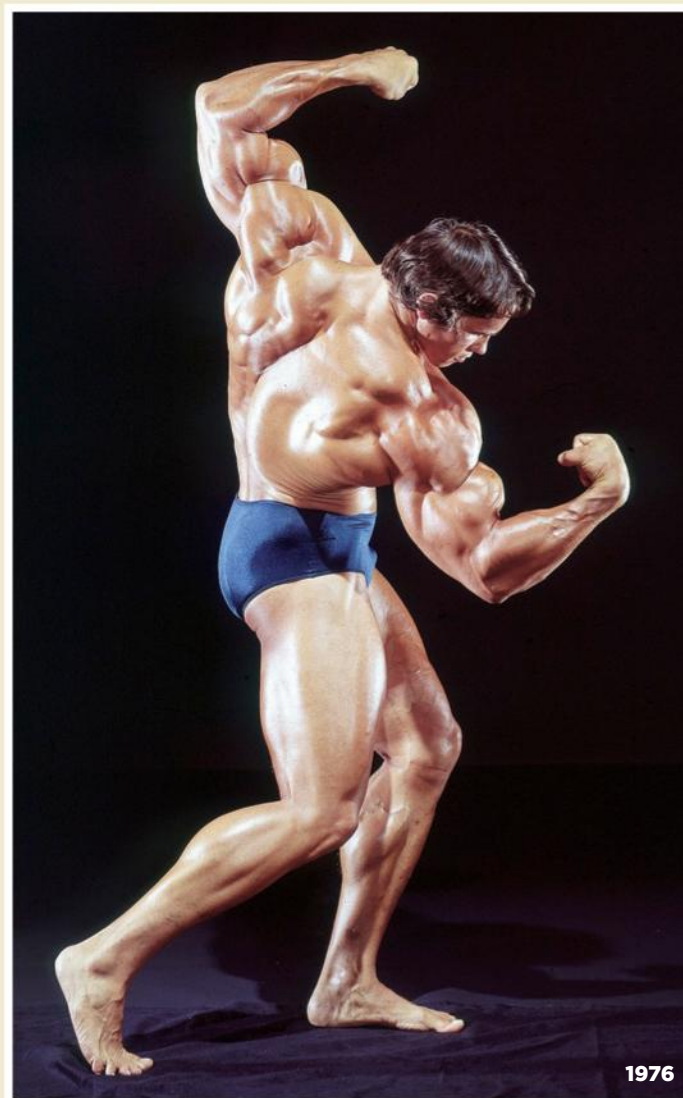
"Yeah, but 13 of them are mine," Schwarzenegger says with a laugh.

It was the weight room where Schwarzenegger became a champion. His domination of the sport of bodybuilding—his empire during the 1970s—grew out of a youthful fascination with the films of Reg Park and Steve Reeves, bodybuilders who both played Hercules in films (a role Schwarzenegger also played in his first film, *Hercules in New York*). He went on to surpass them, winning five Mr. Universe and seven Mr. Olympia titles before retiring from bodybuilding competition. He keeps his hand in as an executive editor of a couple of bodybuilding magazines, and is still involved in the Arnold Classic, an annual men's bodybuilding competition in Columbus, Ohio.

"When I started in bodybuilding, I didn't think about becoming famous," Schwarzenegger says. "I didn't know anything about celebrity. I grew up so sheltered that I was not worldly enough to think about this stuff. When the first person asked me for an autograph, I had no idea what

The Evolution of ARNOLD

From bodybuilder to barbarian, from Terminator to governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger has been a dominant force since the 1970s



The Bodybuilder

Flexing biceps the size of cannon balls, Schwarzenegger commanded center stage in the bodybuilding world of the 1970s. He was named Mr. Universe in 1968 at the age of 20, and later went on to win seven Mr. Olympia titles—the top award in the sport—including six times in a row. *The Guinness Book of World Records* called him "the most perfectly developed man in the history of the world."



Total Recall, 1990



Conan the Barbarian, 1982

The Actor

Crafting his body with iron was only the beginning for Schwarzenegger. He brought the fantasy book antihero Conan the Barbarian to the screen in 1982, but it was his role as the murderous cyborg in James Cameron's *The Terminator* in 1984 that transformed him into the biggest action star in Hollywood. He went on to star in several sequels, and battled aliens, mobsters and even the devil himself in a host of films. He made several comedies and even a drama, and this January he stars in his first primetime show, "The New Celebrity Apprentice," on NBC.



Terminator 2: Judgment Day, 1991



California Governor, 2003-2011

The Politician

He had no political experience, but Schwarzenegger became governor of California, the largest economy in the United States, in the 2003 California governor recall election. He received 4.2 million votes, more than his three other opponents combined, and was reelected in 2006. He conducted business from an ornate tent on his patio where cigar smoking was encouraged and legal—unlike inside the capitol. He left office in 2011.

—David Savona



When Schwarzenegger was governor of California, he faced a smoking ban in his Sacramento offices. To puff his beloved stogies while doing business, he created a comfortable smoking tent.

they wanted. I just wanted to be a bodybuilding champion and be in movies. I didn't look at that as being a star. To me it was a regular job, that happened to be seen by millions of people."

A large black-and-white photo of Schwarzenegger in his prime—the young colossus who helped push bodybuilding into the mainstream—adorns one wall of Gold's. While Schwarzenegger still sports biceps that look like they could crack walnuts, working out is a different sport today. "The muscles don't respond the way they did at 30," he says. "I've weighed 220 pounds for the last 25 years. I competed at 245—but my waist was much smaller then."

Asked what he sees when he looks at himself these days, Schwarzenegger grimaces.

"When I look in the mirror, I throw up," he says. "And I was already so critical of myself, even when I was in top physical shape. I'd look in the mirror after I won one Mr. Olympia after another and think, 'How did this pile of shit win?' I never saw perfection. There was always something lacking. I could always find a million things wrong with myself and that's what got me back into the gym—because I started out with that mentality."

He also had a curiosity and discipline, which helped him make the leap from being a bodybuilding champion to become one of the biggest movie action stars of the 1980s and 1990s. While competing he earned a bachelor's degree in business administration, investing his winnings and endorsement fees into real estate, as well as starting a bricklaying company staffed by himself and other bodybuilders.

"Arnold is 100 percent self-made," Burnett notes. "He's an immigrant who even had to learn the language when he came here in 1968. He's an embodiment of the American dream: that, through hard work and absolute dedication, anything is possible."

As a young man, Schwarzenegger used an outgoing, brash personality to draw focus; now he doesn't need to because the public's attention encircles him like a field of gravity. His sense of humor is still dry and ever-present, and he's happy and comfortable talking to all who

approach. He strides through life, unafraid of being seen because he's had a talent for getting people to look at him for one reason or another for more than a half-century.

There is an ease and an air of confidence to Schwarzenegger that can be deceptive. The key, he says, is preparation: practice, practice, practice. Or, in gym lingo, he's "doing the reps," repeating a task until it becomes automatic.

"I do lack confidence," Schwarzenegger claims. "But I do the reps and do them enough that the thing itself will be doable when it's time. When I was competing at bodybuilding, I did so many hours of reps—on the weights, practicing the poses—that when I got onstage, I was comfortable and confident. The more reps you do, the more you look smooth and convincing. The more you do it, the better you get. That's my lesson from sports. It's the same with movies, the same with interviews. Practice, practice, practice, reps, reps, more reps. That's how you gain confidence."

The irony is not lost on Schwarzenegger that even as he, a former high government official, is making his debut in reality TV, former reality-star Trump will assume elected office for the first time. As it happened, both faced allegations of impropriety. In Schwarzenegger's case, he apologized publicly, saying, "Yes, I have behaved badly sometimes...I have done things that were not right, which I thought then was playful, but now I recognize that have offended people...I want to say to them, I am deeply sorry about that, and I apologize."

"If you run for office, they fling everything at you," Schwarzenegger says. "There is the media and there are the opponents' researchers—they all do it. Everyone is taking shots and you cannot be upset because that's what it is. What's the saying—if it's too hot, get out of the kitchen?"

As he talks, it is a week after the 2016 U.S. presidential election,

"When I look in the mirror, I throw up. The muscles don't respond the way they did at 30."

which has led to some concerns on his part about what direction the new administration will take on the environment. He was alarmed at Trump's campaign vows to hobble the Environmental Protection Agency, revive the coal industry and disavow the climate-change treaties signed by the Obama administration.

"That's why I did not vote for him," Schwarzenegger, a longtime Republican, says. "I'm hoping we can all work together to make America a leader in environmental issues. We have to look to the future to find new ways to produce cleaner, renewable energy."

Ever the positivist, he adds, "We're going to support him. We all have to work together. As President Obama said, if he's successful, we all are. That is the key thing. We've got to move the country forward. That's the only way we stay No. 1."

Arturo Fuente DON CARLOS

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That vision of America as No. 1 was what attracted Schwarzenegger to the U.S.A. in the late 1960s. At the time he was a poor teen from the small Austrian village of Thal, where he grew up without television or telephone. He turned a passion for bodybuilding into a business empire—then used that as a springboard to movie stardom and political office.

Now that his term in the statehouse is behind him, he keeps those years in perspective: “I don’t look at it as my life ‘after being governor,’” he says. “I took seven years out of my regular life and put it into public service. Then I continued on with everything else. The only thing that really changed is I’m more interested in public policy. I got hooked on environmental issues.”

In his 2012 autobiography, *Total Recall: My Unbelievably True Life Story*, Schwarzenegger notes that, whenever he has stumbled in life, the solution

is to be honest about the mistake and then put it behind him: “My rule of thumb about damaging accusations was that, if the allegation was false, fight vigorously to have it withdrawn; if the accusation was true, acknowledge it and, when appropriate, apologize,” he writes.

Which is what he did after ex-wife Maria Shriver discovered in 2011 that Schwarzenegger had fathered a son with their housekeeper, Mildred Baena, 14 years earlier. When news leaked, he made a public apology, and he and Shriver divorced. He publicly acknowledged Joseph Baena as his son and continues to support him. Schwarzenegger remains a hands-on parent with his five kids: Daughter Katherine is following in her mother’s footsteps as a journalist and writer; son Patrick is working as an actor; the youngest are still in college.

Schwarzenegger is not much given to reflection or self-analysis. His life has been dedicated to forward motion—to finding the next challenge and rising to it. When you make mistakes, you correct them and you move on.

“What makes you confident is having victories. But you also have to be comfortable with loss,” he says. “It’s not the end of the world. It’s painful when you wipe out, or when your movie goes in the toilet. It’s embarrassing when they throw dirt at you when you run for office. But how to deal with it is to not dwell on it. Anything big that you want to accomplish is always difficult. The bigger it is, the more risk there is. Being comfortable does not bring success or greatness—taking risks does.”

His 70th birthday will be in July. With a list of career peaks that would fill the resumes of three lesser men, Schwarzenegger is still seeking new challenges.

“Retirement? That’s not happening,” he says, stirring fresh fruit and yogurt together with muesli for his after-workout breakfast. “That doesn’t work for me because everything I do, I enjoy... I don’t do anything that you’d consider a ‘job’ job. I go to China to work in a movie one day, to New York to present an award the next. I go to a few business meetings where I get together with friends and talk about how to make one dollar into many dollars.

It’s fun. Why would I retire from that?

“I don’t feel my age,” Schwarzenegger says. “I do everything exactly the same as I did 20 years ago. You do have to be more careful not to injure yourself, more careful with the way you warm up. I’m a little bit more cautious when I ski, with not as much skiing through the trees. But I’m not old yet. When I get to be 90, then I’ll be old.

“I don’t think about mortality, except when I go for a physical. I live in denial. I just don’t think about it. I thrive a little on danger or discomfort, on not knowing what’s next and going into the unknown. Whatever happens, happens—and I’m ready. As the saying goes, you can only fall as far as the ground.” ♦

Contributing editor Marshall Fine is critic-in-residence at The Picture House Regional Film Center in Pelham, N.Y.

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"I wanted to produce something I remembered. I wanted to go back to my childhood. I wanted to go back to the happiest moments of my life. I wanted my grandfather to be proud of me. I wanted my father to be proud of me and my children to someday be proud of me. It was something I had to do."

Arturo Fuente

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TWENTY

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What would have happened to the golf universe if Tiger Woods had never played the game?

BY JEFF WILLIAMS

On the 30th of December 1975, Eldrick Tont Woods was delivered into this world in Cypress, California. The son of a retired lieutenant Army officer and the Thai woman he met while on a tour of duty in Vietnam, Woods wasn't born with a silver spoon in his mouth, but he had a sensational swing, a precise putter and an insatiable drive in his DNA. He had the ultimate golf gene.

We all came to know him as Tiger, the nickname his father gave him. He was a product of his calculating father, Earl, and his passionate mother, Kultida, who nurtured their son with uncanny skill to become one of the greatest golfers to ever stride a fairway and lift a trophy, dozens of them. He won 14 majors and transformed the game.

For more than two decades Tiger Woods has been the story of golf, his every move, every stroke chronicled. There have been plenty of other great players during Woods' time—Ernie Els, Phil Mickelson, Greg Norman, Nick Faldo, Vijay Singh—though none with Woods' extraordinary candlepower. He has been his sport's supernova, its calling card, its driving force, its face.

Yet so often over the last few years, Woods' bright light has flickered, dimmed, gone dark. Injuries, the consequence of millions of violent swings since his early teenage years, have devastated his body and destroyed his game. Back surgeries kept him out of golf altogether for a year and a half, and he returned to play in early December, as this issue went to press. Scandal has tarnished his reputation as a one-time role model.

Despite all the spin to the contrary, the game hasn't been the same without him.

But what if the game never had him at all? What if Earl Woods hadn't cut down a golf club and handed it to his son before he was even two years old? What if Kultida Woods hadn't installed her young son's intense drive and singular purpose? What would golf have been like as it crossed from the 20th to the 21st century?

A WORLD WITHOUT TIGER

CHARLIE REDEL / AP PHOTO



PHOTO CREDIT TK





Rivals Woods and Phil Mickelson square off at the Battle At The Bridges in 2003. Mickelson would have ranked No. 1 in the world without Woods.

“He is the only living player to win 79 times, and only one player has won more,” said Tim Finchem, shortly before he stepped down as PGA Tour commissioner in October, whose reign corresponded with Woods’ career. “He’s the only active player to win 14 majors and only one player has won more. I love Jack Nicklaus beyond belief, but I have to put Tiger down as the greatest player to ever play.

“And the way he did it, and when he did it, when more and more good players were coming along, was incredible. It lifted all boats.”

Tiger lifted, rowed and powered all boats. His was the hydroplane that rooster-tailed across the sports landscape and everybody and everything about the game of golf followed in his wake.

But suppose he hadn’t come along at all. Suppose instead of a golf club he picked up a baseball glove or a tennis racket. Suppose instead of pounding the heck out of his fellow professionals on the course, he

pounded the books and became a software engineer, a doctor, a lawyer, a poet. What would have the golf landscape been like?

So we’re going to play what if, and take a look at what Tiger did, and imagine what might have happened had he not done it at all. It’s not all that simple, taking Tiger out of the PGA Tour equation. Woods has won 79 official PGA Tour events, including his 14 major championships. Only Sam Snead has won more Tour events (82), and Jack Nicklaus more majors (18). No player has ever won more money than Tiger, who has career winnings of more than \$110 million. No player has ever occupied the world No. 1 ranking for as many weeks as Woods, 683 in all.

So let’s take all of these statistics out of his column, and see who would benefit. Let’s imagine that Tiger never was Tiger. This is how the game might have played out.

Ernie Els

With no Tiger Woods, Ernie Els’ sparkling career might have shown even brighter, potentially giving him six majors instead of four.

As Woods was thundering to a 15-shot victory in the U.S. Open at Pebble Beach in 2000, the most impressive performance in a major tournament in the history of the game, Els plugged along to finish second, tied with cigar-puffing Miguel Ángel Jiménez. With no Tiger, Els would have had a chance to win a playoff and his third U.S. Open title.

At the 2000 British Open at St Andrews a month later, Woods won his first Claret Jug by eight shots, the start of his Tiger Slam, where he won four consecutive majors, ending with the 2001 Masters. No Tiger, no Tiger Slam. But tied for second at St Andrews was Els and Thomas Bjørn. If Woods had not completely dusted the pair, Els would have gone into a four-hole playoff for the title and might have won his first Open Championship. (He did win two, in 2002 and 2012).

After that thumping, Els was philosophical. “I don’t think if I had played my absolute best I could have beaten Tiger,” he said at the time.

Els also finished second to Woods in three PGA Tour events, including a playoff loss in the 2000 season-opening Mercedes Championship.



Woods cradling the Claret Jug after winning the 2000 British Open on the Old Course at St Andrews. Thomas Bjørn, far left, and Ernie Els, who tied for second place, look on. Right: Chris DiMarco, who never won a major, finished second in two of them to Woods, including the 2005 Masters.



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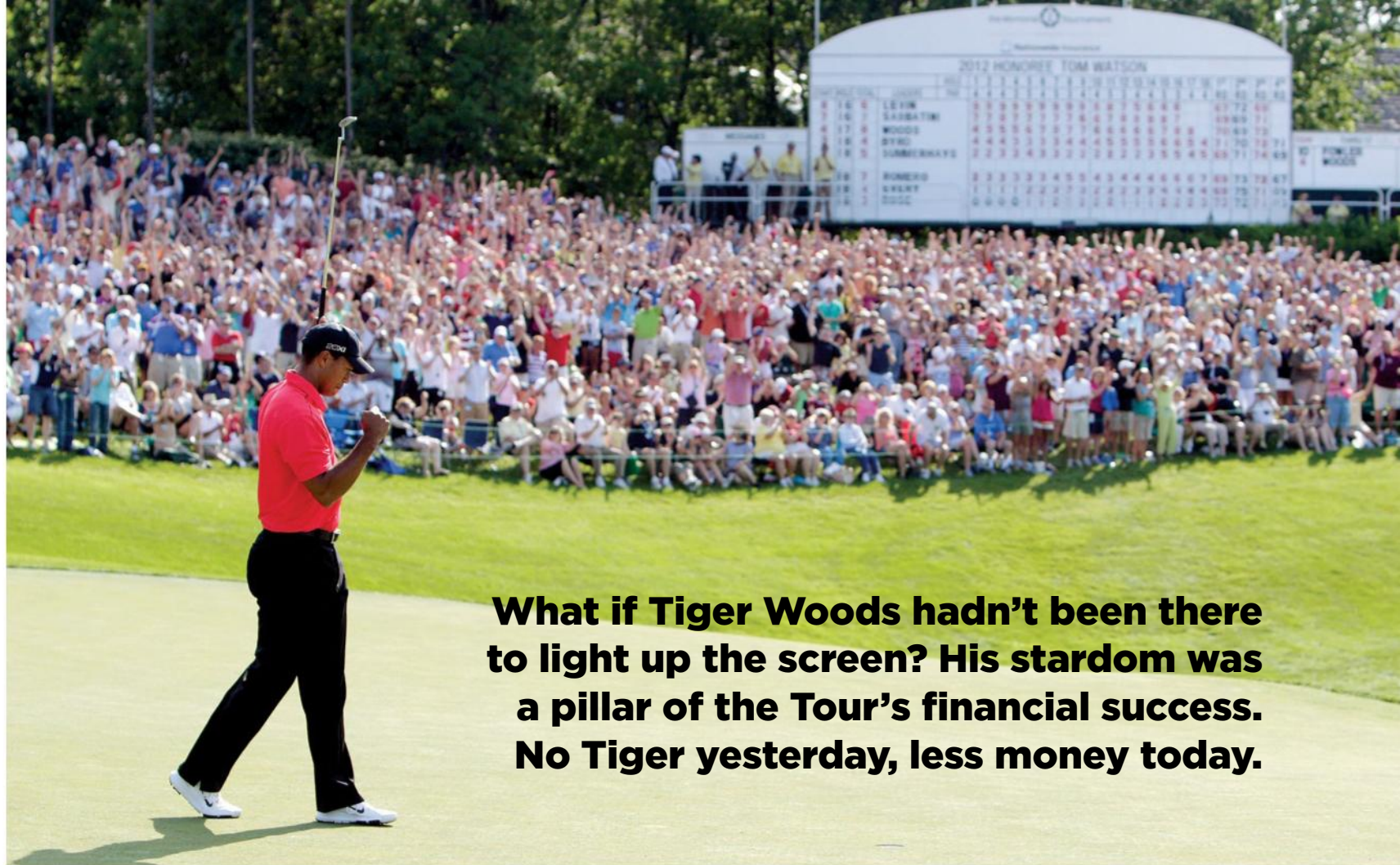
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What if Tiger Woods hadn't been there to light up the screen? His stardom was a pillar of the Tour's financial success. No Tiger yesterday, less money today.

Woods pumps his fist after making a birdie to close the 2012 Memorial Tournament, when he tied host Jack Nicklaus with his 73rd PGA Tour win.

Phil Mickelson

No player spent more time in Woods' shadow than Phil Mickelson, who astoundingly has never been the No. 1 player in the world. Part of that is because he never played well enough at critical moments to seize the No. 1 ranking—even when Woods was missing from the game with injuries—but also because when he was playing well, Woods was right there, hovering above him. During 46 straight weeks from 2001 to 2002, Mickelson was No. 2 in the world, the first time he ever achieved that ranking. And who was above him the entire time? Tiger Woods. Without Tiger's presence, Mickelson would have been an unquestioned No. 1.

Mickelson turned pro in 1992, and it took 12 years for him to win the first of his five majors. He is one away from a career grand slam, needing only a U.S. Open victory, but he has fallen short again and again, holding a record six second-place finishes in the U.S. Open. One was to Woods, in 2002 at Bethpage Black. A world with no Woods could have meant a career grand slam for Mickelson, and six majors.

Lefty also finished second to Woods by one shot in three tournaments: the 1999 WGC Bridgestone Invitational, Arnold Palmer's Bay Hill tournament in 2001, and at Doral in 2005. To be fair, Mickelson won three majors during Tiger's era of dominance, The Masters in 2004 and 2006, along with the 2005 PGA Championship. By 2007, Woods' game began to deteriorate because of injury and his unfortunate sordid episode in 2009 involving his ex-wife, a car crash and a number of infidelities.

"Until I started to play my game better, Tiger owned me," Mickelson has said. There is no question that without Woods, Mickelson would have been the Tour's No. 1 star.

Chris DiMarco

Chris DiMarco could have emerged in the upper echelon of the game. Instead, he had to be satisfied with relative anonymity and zero majors after his encounters with Woods.

He came tantalizingly close. In 2005, DiMarco led The Masters for the first two rounds, but lost in a playoff for the green jacket to Woods, who won the last of his four times at Augusta National. Who can forget Woods' chip-in on the 16th on Sunday, the ball posing for a photo op with its Nike swoosh in full display before falling into the hole for a birdie? Woods won the playoff by draining a long putt for birdie.

A year later, DiMarco finished second to Woods by two shots in the British Open at Royal Liverpool, in part because Woods had holed a shot from the fairway for an eagle two on a par 4.

DiMarco also fell victim to Woods in regular PGA events, finishing second to him by a shot in the 2005 Bridgestone Invitational, a tournament Woods owned in his career with eight total victories.

So just think what the career consequence might have been for DiMarco if Woods had not been there to thwart him. He would have had two major victories and a WGC victory to tack on to his three career PGA Tour wins. And his confidence level in winning those events might have propelled him to several more victories. Hall of Fame career? Possibly.

"There are a lot of guys who'd love to have some putts back or who kick themselves about bogeys and doubles down the stretch," said DiMarco a couple of seasons ago. "But I always made birdies coming in and just got beaten...by the best in the world."

Without Tiger, Who Wins?

Tiger Woods has won again and again in the world of golf, but who would have won without him? We analyzed his victories to see who would have finished first if he didn't play.



Els at the 2000 British Open

1 Ernie Els
two more majors
five more total wins

THE MAJORS Who would have won?

Masters

1997 Tom Kite
2001 David Duval
2002 Retief Goosen
2005 Chris DiMarco

U.S. Open

2000 Ernie Els/
Miguel Ángel Jiménez
2002 Phil Mickelson
2008 Rocco Mediate

British Open

2000 Ernie Els/Thomas Bjørn
2005 Colin Montgomerie
2006 Chris DiMarco

PGA Championship

1999 Sergio Garcia
2000 Bob May
2006 Shaun Micheel
2007 Woody Austin



Mickelson at the 2002 US Open

2 Phil Mickelson
one more major
four more total wins



DiMarco at the 2005 Masters

3 Chris DiMarco
two more majors
three more total wins



Singh at the 2006 Deutsche Bank Championship

4 Vijay Singh
no more majors
five more total wins

TOP: CHRISTINE NESBITT / AP PHOTO; BOTTOM, LEFT TO RIGHT: KATHY WILLENS / AP PHOTO; CHRIS O'MEARA / AP PHOTO; CHARLES KRUPA / AP PHOTO



Woods exulting after a clutch shot, wearing his trademark Sunday red and black. A world without Tiger would have been far different indeed.

to win a major, the 2007 PGA, Woods was there to confirm that Austin just wasn't quite good enough. Austin finishing second, a mere two shots behind, leaving him forever consigned to the Woods pile of victims.

A golf world without Tiger Woods would have meant more than just the impact on these many individual careers. He forever altered the mindset of the modern golfer with his athletic approach to the game. He worked out religiously, carved himself into a physical specimen. Only Gary Player had ever earned a reputation as a fitness freak before Tiger came along. Once other players saw Tiger's extraordinary success, and linked some of that to his extraordinary body, they followed him into the gym like lemmings. And mentally, he walked right on to the Tour in 1996 expecting to win. He combined his athletic physique with a steely psyche, the platform of success for today's players.

"I think he changed the way young players approached the game and came to the Tour," says Jim Nantz, the CBS broadcaster who has chronicled Woods' career with both passion and admiration. "The way he built his body, the way he played without any fear, I think that's how Rory McIlroy, Jason Day, Jordan Spieth play. And how they play, and the rest of the newest generation plays, has Tiger's fingerprints all over it."

Woods also impacted and influenced the scope of the game in the television age. No player since the late, great, incomparable Arnold Palmer drew so much attention to the sport. The television camera loved him, though in truth he didn't love it back nearly as much as Palmer.

When Woods played, ratings soared. In research provided by CBS for regular PGA Tour events from 2003 to 2010, Tiger's presence in a tournament could as much as double the viewing audience. When he wasn't in the field, the ratings plummeted. And golf's all-time highest rated tournaments all occurred as Tiger was in the hunt, and usually winning.

Those ratings led to revenues. The cost for golf's television rights soared during the Woods era, climbing from about \$80 million in 1997, Woods' first full season on Tour, to \$280 million by 2011. That year, new nine-year agreements were reached with CBS and NBC that have a combined worth in the billions of dollars, and they were inked when Woods' game had gone south. But through the shrewd financial maneuverings of the PGA Tour, led by commissioner Tim Finchem, television ponied up, and in turn purse money skyrocketed.

What if Woods hadn't been there to light up the screen? His stardom was a pillar of the Tour's success. No Tiger yesterday, less money today.

And it's a stunning coincidence that the Golf Channel, the first single-sport cable television outlet, began in 1995 as Woods was in the midst of a dominating amateur career. With Palmer as an original backer of the 24-hour channel devoted to what was often considered an elitist sport, the Golf Channel had the benefit of Woods' beacon. It isn't too much of a reach to say that without Woods, the cable network's chances of success would have been considerably less. Without Tiger, you wouldn't be turning it on at 2 a.m. to watch a tournament in Dubai.

"He was the reason for the explosive increase in ratings that we saw for golf and a significant part of the increase in rights payments that we all paid," says Sean McManus, president of CBS Sports.

The rise of Tiger also corresponded to the reign of Finchem as the tour commissioner. He did an outstanding job in taking over from Deane Beman and growing the tour by leaps and bounds, and leaping and bounding that he had Woods in the driver's seat.

"I'll take another Tiger Woods tomorrow to dominate for 20 years, and hopefully he'll come back," says Finchem.

But there is a downside to having such a huge star in the golf galaxy. "He takes all the air out of media. He becomes the entire focus," said Finchem at the time. "It's understandable, but the one negative about it is that it is very difficult to create new stars in that environment. That last two or three years it's been easy: a lot of that is because of the quality of the players and how they handle themselves so well. A lot of it has to do with media exposure they can generate now."

The same question was asked about golf's all-time major leader when he left the game. "When Jack Nicklaus won his last tournament in 1986, and I became commissioner in 1994, the questions were what are you going to do now because you don't have a Jack Nicklaus?" says Finchem. "They may have glossed over Greg Norman, who was No. 1 in the rankings for more than 300 weeks."

Some asked Finchem how can one man dominate when he is only part of the fabric for 18 or so tournaments a year. "Tiger comes along in the fall of 1996 after turning pro after his second year and he dominates," he says. "All of these tournaments...have grown in almost every category year to year. The lesson is that fans love golf."

And they needed someone to love. If Woods wasn't as lovable as Palmer, he certainly was exciting. He was the Tour's *raison d'être*.

If he had stayed at Stanford to get a business degree, the PGA Tour and its players wouldn't have been counting nearly as much money as they do today.

In his prime, Tiger Woods beat up on every single player, but at the same time he lifted them all up.

The Tour without Tiger? It would have just been golf. ♦

Jeff Williams is a contributing editor to CIGAR AFICIONADO.



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THE NEW RULES ON CUBAN CIGARS

It's now legal to bring Cuban cigars back to the United States from anywhere, but restrictions still apply and some questions remain unanswered

BY GORDON MOTT



The traveler stood in line at JFK. In his bags, he had \$2,000 worth of Cuban cigars that he had purchased in London. His arrival was a week after the U.S. Treasury had further loosened the rules for American citizens importing Cuban cigars and rum into the United States. Still there were limits: \$800 worth or 100 cigars to come in without duty. The traveler was honest. He declared everything, expecting to pay a four-percent duty on the cigars in excess of the limits. “Have a nice day,” said the customs agent. “We’re giving you a holiday on the extra duty.”

Just a few weeks later, I stood in the Global Entry customs line in Dallas. For the first time since I began working at CIGAR AFICIONADO, I carried in my bag Cuban cigars—four sticks purchased in Mexico. Now understand, this scenario used to set off a routine that went something like this: I would approach the customs counter, hand over my passport and wait for the inevitable question: “So, Mr. Mott, which magazine do you work for?” My response was always to cut to the chase: “I don’t have any cigars, sir.” This time, no one even asked me if I had cigars, but

rather, I got a perfunctory, “Welcome to the United States.”

Each example illustrates how customs greetings have changed in a few short years for Cuban cigar enthusiasts returning to the United States. The shift began on December 17, 2014, when President Obama announced that he was moving toward normalizing relations with Cuba, and was committed to finding ways to allow more U.S. travel to Cuba without violating the parameters of the Cuban trade embargo, which is subject to Congressional oversight. Since then, significant moves have been made: restrictions on people-to-people tours have been loosened; scheduled air flights now fly between a number of U.S. cities and several destinations in Cuba, including Havana; and U.S.-flagged cruise ships regularly dock in Havana’s harbor. In addition, the U.S. Interests Section in Havana was upgraded to a full-fledged embassy last summer and earlier in 2016, President Obama visited Cuba with his family.

Still the rules governing importation of Cuban cigars and rum were fairly restrictive: \$100 worth of one or the other or both products combined, and only for those who were travelling between Cuba and the

THE NEW RULES IN BRIEF

YOU CAN NOW BUY CUBAN CIGARS when traveling anywhere outside the U.S. and bring those cigars back. You are allowed as many as 100 cigars, worth up to \$800, without duty.

NO MORE \$100 LIMIT for those traveling to Cuba. You can bring back far more cigars than before, so long as they are for personal consumption.

YOU CAN'T RESELL THE CUBAN CIGARS upon your return to the United States. The new rules only allow you to bring cigars in for personal consumption.

BUT YOU CAN GIVE THEM AWAY. You are allowed to give away Cuban cigars you bring back as gifts. Your friends will appreciate this gesture.

NO INTERNET, NO MAIL ORDER. It remains illegal to buy Cuban cigars from abroad via the phone, Internet or catalog and have them sent to the United States.

YOU WON'T SEE CUBANS IN YOUR LOCAL BRICK AND MORTAR. Cuban cigar sales in the U.S. remain banned under the embargo. Your local store still cannot sell cigars from Havana.

THE RULES REMAIN VAGUE when it comes to total quantities. Our rate of personal consumption is likely much, much higher than what a U.S. Customs agent would believe. There is no formal definition to the upper limits of "personal consumption." If you stick to the 100 cigars/\$800 value limit for duty-free import you can be extra certain you are within your rights.



United States, with no purchases allowed in other countries. Even then, only authorized travelers to Cuba could take advantage of the privilege to return with barely a handful of cigars. But on October 14, 2016, the rules changed in ways that no one had anticipated. Suddenly, U.S. citizens were allowed to legally buy Cuban cigars or rum in any country, including Cuba, and bring them back to the United States under the same limits applied to all tobacco or alcoholic beverages: \$800 worth or 100 cigars (whichever is less) to come in without fees; and one liter of alcoholic beverage. Prior to that new rule, Americans could not buy Cuban product anywhere in the world without breaking the law.

Here is how the regulations apply in general. Any traveler returning to the United States is eligible for a personal duty-free exemption on most goods. If you have been out of the country for more than 48 hours, and have not been out more than once in the previous 30 days, the amount is typically \$800. The same limits now govern Cuban tobacco products. Any tobacco product exceeding the limit is subject to a 4-percent duty.

Alcohol has long been an exception. Most departure points are limited to one liter regardless of price. Although certain Caribbean nations are granted a two-liter limit, Cuba is not one of those.

Sounds simple, right? Well, the law gets a little vague, if you want to extend the limit by paying duty. The law states very clearly: "Authorized travelers may also return to the United States with alcohol and/or tobacco products acquired in Cuba as accompanied baggage for personal use." (The same language applies to cigars bought in other countries.) The phrase "personal use" means that any customs agent is within his or her rights to question your intentions if you return with, say, a suitcase filled with 50 boxes of cigars. While the regulations also make it very clear that you may give your cigars to a third party, if you sell them or receive any kind of compensation in return for them, you are breaking the law.

Another issue that remains problematic is whether or not cigars acquired during the last 50 years and kept in storage outside the United States, are now eligible to be repatriated under the current regulation. The question was put to four different agencies: the U.S. Treasury, the Office of Foreign Assets Control, Customs and Border Patrol and the Department of Homeland Security. One office replied, "This response is off the record. I have no further guidance to give you on your subject." This may be an overthinking of the issue, but it is possible that a product purchased while it was illegal to do so might be subject to a different, perhaps stricter, interpretation of the law and confiscated if you tried to enter the country with it. Until there is a better answer, I would remain cautious bringing home boxes of 30-year-old Cuban Davidoffs.

Another point: If you are leaving Cuba with more than 50 cigars, or two boxes, be sure to have the invoices handy to show Cuban customs officials you purchased them from an official source, and are not trying to smuggle out contraband. One traveler in November had 450 cigars, some unbanded and others in boxes, and he was asked to produce documentation. But he also received the duty waiver in Miami at U.S. Customs.

Even as the rules have made it easier for individual Americans to acquire and return home with Cuban cigars, the prohibition remains in place on importing those same cigars for commercial use. Craig Cass, a retailer in North Carolina, says he has been getting frequent questions about "why aren't you selling Cuban cigars?" He has to explain that the trade embargo with Cuba is still in effect. Another retailer, Curt Diebel, of Kansas City, reported that same situation in his stores, but also added that no one is coming in waving their Cuban cigar around saying they bought them on their last trip out of the country.

There's also another reality for everyone to consider. As this article goes to print, the United States is less than a month away from President Donald Trump taking office, and he promised on the campaign trail to undo all of President Obama's executive orders. Presumably those orders that changed the rules on travel to Cuba would be included. Trump also promised in November to get tough again on Cuba. Presumably, if he does repeal those orders, then the rules will revert back to the previous administration's guidelines regarding purchases of Cuban products, including cigars and rum. It could mean a complete prohibition on cigars and rum or perhaps the lower \$100 limit allowed for authorized travelers to Cuba. Third-country purchases would probably be eliminated too.

If that happens, American cigar smokers will have only enjoyed a brief window when it was legal to bring significant quantities of Cuban cigars into the United States. Stay tuned. ♦



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THE BACCARAT MACHINE

I knew there would be shoes. No woman wins tens-of-millions-of-dollars from casinos without treating herself to a few nice rides. But I was unprepared for the sheer quantity, quality and acquisitional gusto. Cheung Yin Sun, who goes by the name Kelly, has walk-in closets overflowing with heels, flats, pumps and wedges. Jimmy Choo, Christian Louboutin and Manolo Blahnik are all represented. There are enough sneakers to outfit an NBA team and loads of boots reside in the garage—right alongside her new BMW.

Then, in the midst of our leather-themed tour, she moves on to handbags, showing off limited-edition models from Louis Vuitton, Chanel and Hermès. Most striking of all is a money-green pocketbook made from reptile skin.

“It’s crocodile!” Kelly enthuses. “That one was a gift from Phil.”

The “Phil” she refers to is none other than poker legend Phil Ivey. He made headlines in 2012 when Crockfords Casino in London refused to cash more than \$11 million in chips that he won playing baccarat. Ivey sued the refined gambling-den and Crockfords steadfastly maintained that Ivey had won by deceptive means. (Ivey and his lawyers did not respond to repeated requests for comment.) A recent appeal failed to pan out, a bid for a U.K. Supreme Court hearing is in the works and the pair remain in the hole on their profits from there.

CHEUNG YIN SUN CLEANS OUT CASINOS AROUND THE WORLD USING ACUTE SKILL AND INTUITION

BY MICHAEL KAPLAN
PORTRAITS BY TOMAS MUSCIONICO

Though Ivey might be a card-playing genius, in the case of this baccarat caper all he had to do was bet. Kelly did the heavy lifting. The brains behind the operation, she brought Ivey along on a casino spree that generated more than \$30 million.

The pair won their money by employing a technique known as edge sorting. It involves capitalizing on casinos that use playing cards in

which the edges on either side are unevenly cut by fractions of an inch. In the game of mini-baccarat, in which players do not touch their cards, Kelly employed social engineering techniques to convince Chinese-speaking dealers to turn certain cards “for good luck.” It allowed her to set the decks so that she could recognize the game’s key cards: sixes, sevens, eights and nines. Winning millions becomes a foregone conclusion when you play the Kelly way.

Sitting in her high-ceilinged living room in Las Vegas, with a golf course on the gated grounds and a gorgeous pool out back, Kelly is petite and pretty and easy with a laugh. For the first time, she is welcoming a journalist into her home. Historically, she dodges reporters and dons enormous sunglasses in order to frustrate paparazzi. They snapped photos of her outside of the London courthouse where she and Ivey litigated in an attempt to get their winnings. On a warm summer afternoon, Kelly provides CIGAR AFICIONADO with an exclusive deep-dive into her life and world.

Cheung Yin Sun, or “Kelly” as she prefers to go by, has made millions outsmarting and outplaying casinos.





One of the most fascinating people in casino gambling, she seems surprisingly blasé in describing what she does to drive casino personnel crazy. “I’m very happy to beat the casinos, but not excited,” she says. “I feel satisfaction but not necessarily joy. This is work and I am a professional. It’s what I have trained myself to do. I do not feel bad if I lose and I do not feel emotions if I win.”

She has a nickname that is well earned: Baccarat Machine.

Kelly is also an automatic teller machine—one that pulls money out of casinos and puts it in her own coffers. It’s a life for which she seemed to not be remotely destined. Currently 40 years old, she was born in Northern China where her father’s family had made fortunes in banking. She should have indulged herself in a life of ease and wealth, but it did not work out that way after her father fell victim to China’s Cultural Revolution. Mao Zedong’s thugs imprisoned the wealthy and took away their belongings. Her father ranked among of them.

He was sent to a work camp during the last years of Mao’s reign. “Until I turned seven [in 1983] I was very poor,” Kelly tells me. “You know how I like shoes now? When I was a little girl, I had no shoes. We were so poor that my mother had to make shoes for us. She cut out pieces of cardboard from cartons and those were our shoes. My feet got very cold in winter. It was a terrible time. We had to grow our own vegetables. I lived like a country girl.”

Following Mao’s passing, and more capitalist-oriented leadership in China, her father was released and regained his wealth through the launching of a factory that produced wooden products. “He got rich again; he got very rich,” Kelly says with a smile. “He sent me to Shanghai for school. I went to Hong Kong. I got nice clothing. I had a nice life.”

She also indulged a passion for gambling. By the age of 15, Kelly was putting up money to play a Chinese version of poker. She used a fake ID

to go on gambling cruises out of Hong Kong and made her way to Macau while still underage and flush with family money. “I had about \$1,500 on me and won \$150,000 playing baccarat,” she says, admitting that the seminal experience hooked her on casino gambling. “I bought myself a nice Rolex. Later, when I went to Paris to study French and fashion design at the Sorbonne, somebody told me I had a nice watch. I said, ‘Okay. Gift to you.’ I gave that person my watch.”

Kelly thinks about it for a beat, maybe considering whether or not generosity provides a karmic return. “Now my favorite watch is Hublot. I have a lot of watches.”

Though her father was not particularly interested in gambling, he willingly funded Kelly’s predilection for financial risk. She spent her 20s as a kind of high-stakes jet-setter, going to posh gambling spots around the world and blowing money like it didn’t matter. She played blackjack, baccarat, slot machines, video poker, craps, even a bit of Texas hold’em. Kelly never met a casino game that she didn’t like and casino bosses loved her for it.

In Monte Carlo, Las Vegas and Macau, she received the total

red carpet treatment. “They would give me penthouse suites, send me bottles of Champagne, comp my dinners, pay bills at the nightclub; I got promotional chips and money for shopping,” she remembers, acknowledging that her hemorrhaging millions of dollars correlated with the fancy perks. “I lost \$3 million at Palms and stayed in a suite with a pool looking out on the Strip.”

In 2006 she checked into Wynn Las Vegas and put \$200,000 on deposit to fund her gambling. As usual, most of the bankroll was rapidly decimated. Left with just \$4,000, she wandered the rows of slot machines, hoping to get lucky. Kelly was still enough of a casino denizen to rely on fortune and believed in the possibility of randomly striking it rich.

She came across a man working the slots with fleet-fingered speed. “He played the dollar machines and I thought, ‘Oh, he must be a professional,’” she remembers, ignoring the fact that she had no idea what a professional slot machine player really was. “I went up and asked him to teach me how to play. He looked at me and said, ‘Oh, you’re a very pretty girl. I’ll teach you to play.’”

The man was indeed a professional gambler.

He goes under the name Steven Black and makes a living by finding various, unmined edges in casinos. Formerly a successful car salesman, Black derives profits from rebates that casinos give to losing players, he’s expert at advanced blackjack moves such as ace sequencing and shuffle tracking, he has impeccable vision and an uncanny memory. As put by the talented sports bettor Bill “Krackman” Krackomberger: “He’s the sharpest of the sharp.”

Black took Kelly under his wing. They hit casinos in California, New Orleans and Tunica. Kelly was a quick study and she recognized that this was more apprenticeship than money-making endeavor. “We won like \$600,000 in Palm Springs,” she remembers, citing a faulty machine mis-wired to deal blackjacks every time a player split Aces. “That day, Steven gave me \$1,200.



Calm and focused, Kelly (top) sits at a Poker table at London’s Grand Connaught Rooms during the European Poker Tour. Kelly and gambling partner Phil Ivey (above) on their way to London’s High Court.



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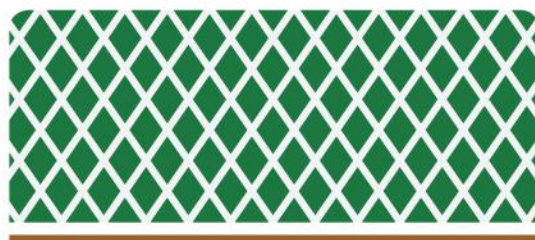
For the most part, though, he paid me \$20 per hour. I was, like, 'Okay, I'm learning.'"

Despite Black's best efforts to turn her from a sucker to a stone-cold advantage player, Kelly could not completely shed her old ways. One night in 2006, she and friends from Shanghai were gambling it up at MGM Grand in Las Vegas. A pal had dropped \$500,000 and asked to borrow \$100,000. Kelly didn't have the cash on her but she signed a marker for her friend. Aware that in Las Vegas, markers are the equivalent of checks and that an unpaid marker is no different from a bad check, she trusted the friend who promised to pay it back and had the means to do so. "I went to Paris for six months and she told me that she had paid it off," says Kelly. "But, on my way back to Vegas, I entered the U.S. in Philadelphia and something happened." She didn't even get the opportunity to pass through immigration. "Police came on the plane and handcuffed me. They said that I owed \$93,000 on an unpaid marker."

Kelly wound up spending 21 days in downtown Las Vegas's Clark County Detention Center. It took that long before her father could fly to Vegas and pay a total of \$104,000—there were additional fees—to straighten things out. "Jail was terrible," she remembers. "At 3:00 in the morning they had hounds sniffing for drugs. I thought the underwear was dirty and would not wear it. For that I was put in solitary confinement and slept on the floor. Steven came to visit me and I told him I was very hungry. I asked for \$50. He said, 'No. Don't eat. It will make you sleepy.' Instead he gave me a deck of cards and told me to work on my card counting. I practiced every day and got good. I wanted to beat MGM [because of what had happened]."

What she would eventually come up with, of course, proved way more profitable than card counting. She taught herself to edge sort and devised an ingenious technique for applying it to mini-baccarat, a game where the casino does not blink at bets of \$50,000 or more. Here's how baccarat gets played: In the game of baccarat four cards get dealt onto the table, two for player and two for banker. The object is to bet on the two cards for player or the two cards for banker and hope that your pick gets closer to a total of nine than the other. Aces count as one, 10s and picture cards are zero, everything else is face value. If a total comes to 15, it counts as five; 18 counts as eight and so on.

Kelly is not the first person to leverage the move known as edge sorting—finding games that use cards, such as a type made by Gemaco—and take advantage of unmatched edges. Her breakthrough resides in her technique. After a few test runs in the fall of 2011—"Small money," she says, "we made \$200,000 at Palms, \$300,000 at MGM"—she put the big play into action inside the Salon Privé private gaming room at Aria. Kelly and three collaborators established themselves as losing players by dropping \$100,000 playing the game straight and losing it all. The next day they came back, deposited \$500,000 and asked to play "Macau style." The casino acquiesced. Four cards were dealt before Kelly and crew made their bets. They played through one shoe and lost \$175,000 while having the dealer turn key cards—sixes, sevens, eights and nines—so that the short trims faced her.



"THIS IS WORK AND
I AM A PROFESSIONAL...
I DON'T FEEL BAD IF I LOSE
AND I DO NOT FEEL
EMOTIONS IF I WIN"



On the next shoe, Kelly was able to read the cards and know when it would be advantageous to bet player or banker. The game may as well have been dealt face-up. "Every hand, I bet \$40,000," recounts Kelly, adding that she and her partners emptied the chip tray of all \$5,000 and \$25,000 chips. They got replenished; the game got destroyed. "The pit-boss and casino manager came over to watch. Before the shoe was finished, we had won a million dollars. I said, 'Okay. Let's go.' We cashed out, left through the front door and drove to Caesars Palace. We already had a big suite there—no regular room for me—and put \$300,000 on deposit."

They repeated the play at Caesars and won \$200,000. Next stop was Treasure Island for a take of \$300,000. After that they flew to Connecticut and played Foxwoods. The wins were big and audacious and impossible to keep on the down-low. A posting on the Internet by a casino security specialist limned the strategy for gaming insiders. "A week later I

saw Steven at Treasure Island," says Kelly. "He had read about what we did. He said he knew, 100 percent, that it had to be me."

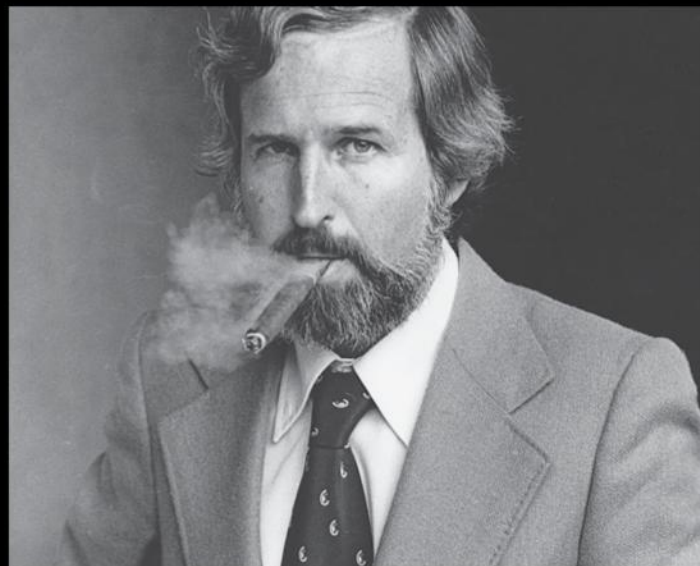
Impressed but recognizing that Kelly had a short shelf life without the right person to do the betting, he asked, "You want to play for big money? I'll introduce you to Phil."

In January of 2012, at the Aussie Millions poker tournament, held in Melbourne, Australia, Phil Ivey won the \$200,000 buy-in high-roller event and took down more than \$2 million. News filtered to Black that Ivey had some \$6 million on him. He was able to bet as much as \$300,000 per hand at baccarat. It seemed like an opportune moment. Kelly and Black boarded a flight from Vegas to Melbourne.

The deal was that in exchange for the introduction, Black would receive 10 percent of their winnings. Additionally, he had been working on a way of controlling dice thrown in craps. He wanted to partner with Ivey on exploiting that as well. As Kelly remembers things, "Steven and Phil played craps and lost \$3 million. Phil only had half his money left and was very upset. They lost the money in just an hour after Steven said he could control the dice. He came to me and said, 'Please, play baccarat so Phil can win back the money. Otherwise I will lose a friend.'"

Operating with Ivey's bankroll, they bought in at the baccarat table and proceeded to lose another \$500,000. "I didn't know those cards!" Kelly says as way of explanation. Ivey was less than understanding. "He called me a hustler and told Steven that he is unprofessional. He had only \$3 million or so left. I asked Phil to give me one night to figure it out. Steven went online and printed out copies of the card-backs being used."

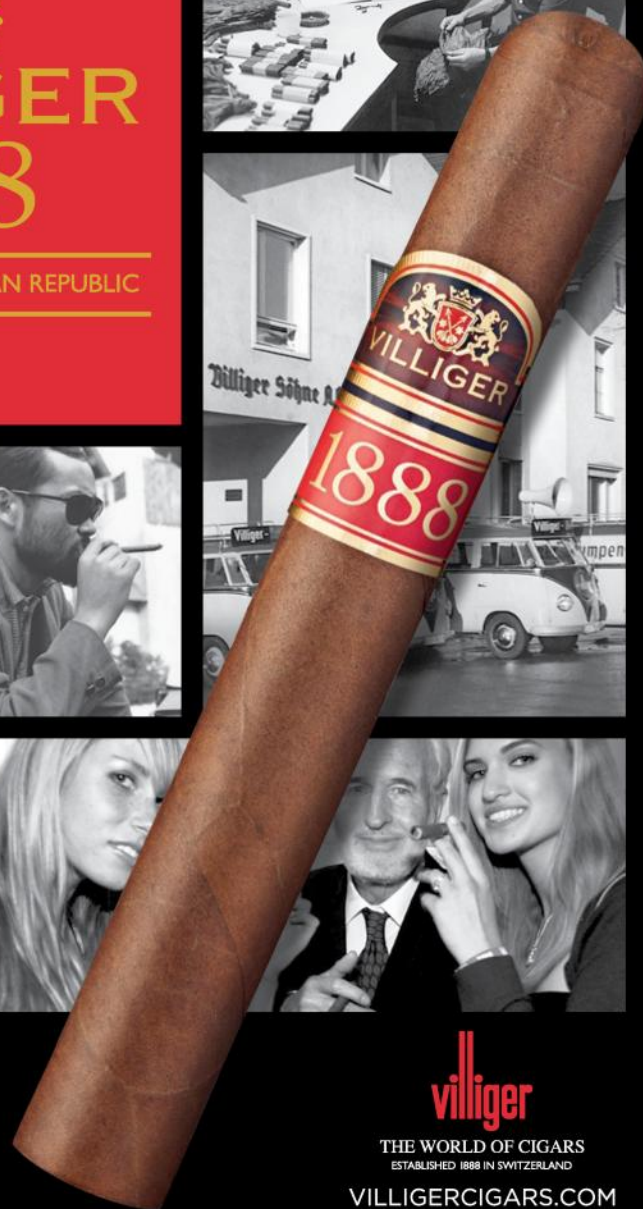
Overnight, Kelly studied the cards and devised a technique for reading them. The next day, she says, "In one hour we won the money back plus \$3 million. The casino gave the money to Phil and asked how he knew me. Somebody from the casino told him that I was internationally famous [for doing the baccarat play]. Phil told them that I had just come into the poker room and that I wanted to play baccarat."



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In short order, Ivey became a believer. Kelly, Ivey and Steven hit the road and ravaged casinos. They played Montreal, Singapore, Macau, Monte Carlo. She wore elegantly cut designer-clothing in overseas high-limit rooms, reprising the role of the globe-trotting action-lover she had once been. They established a routine. After arriving at a gambling spot, Kelly says, “We’d spend the first day relaxing, then we’d go to the nightclub, followed by two or three days playing in the casino. One day we lost \$3 million. Phil was not upset then. We went back and won \$5 million the next night.”

Her birthday in 2012 was a raucous affair. “We went to XS at Wynn,” Kelly remembers. “Phil had girls all around him. I was so drunk. I checked into a room at Wynn instead of going home. The next morning Phil called and I did not answer the phone. Steven came up and started kicking the door. He said, ‘Let’s go, let’s go, the private jet is waiting. We’re going to Borgata [in Atlantic City] to win money.’ I had no clothing or makeup or luggage. I had to buy all new stuff at Borgata. Steven and Phil did not want me eating or sleeping. They only wanted me to be playing. That’s why they called me Baccarat Machine. One time we played 24 hours. Phil slept on the floor [of the high-limit room].”

Everything was going great for the group until an ill-fated London trip in August of 2012. Ivey was in town for a poker tournament and had dropped a bundle. He hoped to win it back at baccarat. Kelly flew in and they hit Crockfords, a venerable casino in the exclusive Mayfair neighborhood. In just six or so hours, over a two-day period, they managed to score the U.S. equivalent of some \$11 million. Kelly says that she suggested stopping at \$5 million, fearing that the casino would balk at them cashing out for an eight-figure sum. Ivey, she says, wanted to keep going. Winning so much so quickly, she says, “We got very lucky.”

After their play wound down, it appeared that Kelly was being overly cautious. “Phil spoke with the casino people, then he came back and showed Steven and I the order for a wire transfer,” she says, explaining that the \$11 million payday from Crockfords appeared to be approved for shipping. With things on track, Ivey quickly returned to Vegas so he could deal with an unexpectedly ill family member. Three days later, the money had yet to land in Kelly’s bank account. She says she called Ivey to ask where the cash was. Either the casino reneged or Ivey still had all the winnings. “He said he did not receive the money. I told him that I did not believe him. After a week, I said, ‘Phil, you don’t need to give me the money. It’s okay. It is only \$11 million. It’s fine. You keep it.’”

Soon after, Kelly was hanging out with friends in France. She made her way down to Nice with the intention of playing in a poker tournament. “I saw Phil,” she remembers. “He told me not to play. Reporters were there and they knew about London. At that point I realized that Phil had been honest about the money not arriving. We wound up leaving France and flying to Atlantic City to play Borgata. Phil and I split the cost of a private jet.”

Not surprisingly, Crockfords refused to cash them out. And while their trip to Borgata was a profitable one—\$9.6 million won over the course of 100 or so hours—legal troubles struck again in The Garden State. The Borgata sued to recoup its baccarat losses. A federal judge sympathized and recently ruled that Ivey was “in breach of his contract” with the casino for playing at an advantage. Now Borgata is trying to get \$15.5 million from Ivey by factoring in comps and the casino’s expected win if Ivey and Kelly had played the game like suckers. The two are appealing.

The headlines were big enough that Kelly is now easily spotted and 86ed from most casinos in Las Vegas. She can’t even play to help an out-of-town



Kelly's penchant for shoes and fashion is matched only by her exacting skill as a player. She's as comfortable in the casino as she is here in her Vegas home.

buddy. During our interview, Kelly stops chatting with me to take a call and speaks in rapid-fire Chinese. After hanging up, she tells me, “That’s my friend from Macau. He just lost \$6 million at MGM. He wants me to play with him, but I can’t. I cannot go into MGM, Wynn or Caesars. Downtown I’m good. But those casinos’ limits are too small. How do you win big money?”

Maybe the extra attention contributed to Ivey having cooled on playing baccarat with Kelly. He turned down an offer to join her on a repeat rampage through Macau. “He said that everywhere is no good for us to play, but it’s not true. I won \$2 million at Galaxy casino there.”

Ivey or no Ivey, Kelly has no interest in giving up. She’s turned down offers to provide consulting services to casinos, continues to play in Asia and is teaching her techniques to students—which may result in the casino nightmare: An army of mini Kellys infiltrating mini-baccarat tables.

As for her herself, Kelly plans on stepping up her poker playing and looks forward to transforming her look and staying below the radar. “I never thought about being famous,” she says. “I am very quiet. I don’t say anything. I just want to beat casinos.” ❖

Michael Kaplan is a CIGAR AFICIONADO contributing editor.

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The background of the page is a large, warm-toned photograph. On the left, a white ceramic vase holds several bleached, white branches. In front of it is a square wooden clock with a white face and black hands. To the right of the clock are two glasses of amber-colored liquid, likely whiskey. In the foreground, a glass of whiskey sits on a patterned tray, with a cigar resting beside it. To the right of the tray is a white ceramic bowl filled with several cigars. The overall aesthetic is rustic and sophisticated.

The biggest surprise of the already startling whiskey boom is the rye revival. Long ago it was America's most popular pour, but it became a dusty afterthought on liquor store shelves in the wake of Prohibition. Yet when the current cocktail revival surged, bartenders with historical bents discovered its importance in classic mixology. By then the choices were few. Most straight ryes were made at Bourbon distilleries that devoted little time to rye production. Furthermore, they tended to be made close to the minimum amount of the spicy grain allowed by law: 51 percent. Burgeoning demand has brought broad diversity and flavorful ryes boasting 90 to 100 percent rye in their mashbill, as well some rye-forward entrants from Canada.

Rye and Cigars

The revival of this spicy whiskey brings on perfect cigar pairings

BY JACK BETTRIDGE PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFF HARRIS

Like its Bourbon cousin, rye is a natural cigar partner—but tangier and not as sweet. We sampled a spectrum of ryes ranging in price from \$19 to \$300 per bottle with two contrasting cigar profiles. The Inch Natural by E.P. Carrillo No. 60 (5 7/8" by 60 ring gauge, \$8.75) was meant to complement spice with its maple, coconut and oak notes. We chose the Rocky Patel 55 Robusto (5 1/2" by 55, \$10.30) to go right after the zesty ryes with its notes of licorice, mint and dark toast. We were quite pleased with the results.

Booker's Rye The Big Time Batch

This rye was made using the uncut/unfiltered ethic of Booker's Bourbon. It was laid down by the legendary Jim Beam distiller Booker Noe and selected by his son Fred when the whiskey was 13. You may want to tame its scorching proof with some water, but the sensation is a roller coaster from sweet to spicy to toasty notes in the form of red berries, red pepper and rye bread. The Inch smoothed out the rye, while becoming bolder itself. The Rocky Patel 55 was the winner, eliciting licorice and cedar where there previously was none. (136.2 proof, \$300)

Bulleit Rye

Rye whiskey was a natural progression for Bulleit, which debuted as a Bourbon high in rye content (28 percent). The version labeled "rye whiskey" amped the spice quotient up to 95 percent. After a vanilla and candy nose, its rye tang meets the palate with cinnamon, licorice and clove. With the Inch, Bulleit achieved a friendly give-and-take, where the maple candy reached accord with the whiskey's cinnamon. The Rocky Patel 55 got toastier in the exchange and gave the whiskey hearty, nutty flavors. (90 proof, \$27)

Canadian Club 100 Percent Rye

During Prohibition, Americans developed a taste for the high-quality, but illegal, Canadian rye blends that served as a substitute for straight American rye. Now some Canadian producers are feeding our demand for spice with high-rye whiskeys. Canadian Club has gone all-in with 100 percent. Despite explicit nutmeg and cinnamon, it manages delicate honey and



The E.P. Carrillo Inch Natural No. 60 (left) and Rocky Patel 55 Robusto provided a wide flavor spectrum to pair with ryes.

vanilla, too. The Inch expanded the CC's softer, barrel notes and benefited from its cinnamon. The Rocky Patel 55 matched it for spice and took some sweetness from the CC. (80 proof, \$20)

Crown Royal Northern Harvest Rye

This Canadian also emphasizes rye grain, this time with 90 percent. The Crown Royal's name showcases the importance of the Canadian climate on rye. The grain is planted in the fall and lies dormant under snow in the winter before fully maturing through summer. The whiskey's palate is fruity, with hard candy, apple cider and caramel. Some white pepper on the finish came on even quicker when paired with the Inch. With the Rocky Patel 55 there was a good balance of sugar and spice and everything nice. (90 proof, \$30)

George Dickel Rye Whisky

If you taste similarities between this rye example from George Dickel (known for its Tennessee sour mash whisky) and the Bulleit rye (above), note that both are owned by Diageo and made by the same third-party distiller. The Dickel difference is that the rye goes through the signature charcoal chill filtering of a Tennessee sour mash to burnish the rough edges and release a creamy, orange menthol note. This suited the Inch well as it became supremely smooth and heartier. The Rocky Patel pairing was a bit flat. (90 proof, \$28)

Knob Creek Straight Rye

This rye is a sibling to Knob Creek Bourbon, and its deep barrel charring gives it orange notes, and the heavily rye mash bill adds notes of rye bread,



The Rye Manhattan

Sorry Martini. The Manhattan is the king of the cocktails. Invented as a rye drink, its combination with sweet vermouth and bitters succinctly conveys the energy and sophistication of the New York borough for which it is named—and it's a savory, complex drink ideal for chilly afternoons or evenings. Historically made by combining two parts rye, one part sweet vermouth and a generous dash or two of Angostura bitters, it can be endlessly adjusted. Change the ratios, vary the brands, or even mix the Perfect Manhattan, blending sweet and dry vermouth. The classic preparation is stirred, but we also enjoy it shaken, which adds froth and bits of ice. Some even serve it with ice in a rocks glass. —JB



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pepper, berry, breathy mint and eucalyptus. Its sweetness brightened the Inch, making it fuller bodied, but the tannins in the rye proved a jarring match with the Rocky Patel. (100 proof, \$39)

Lot No. 40

Hard to find, but well worth the trouble, Lot No. 40 was one of the flag bearers in the charge of extremely high-rye content (100 percent in this case) Canadian whiskies. Hiram Walker distillery makes Lot No. 40 in a copper still. Though it shows lots of anise, it's not biting at all as it produces honey, molasses, sloe berries and cinnamon as well. The sweetness backed off in the Inch pairing, while the cigar got leathery. However, it created sweetness and toasty woods on the Rocky Patel. (86 proof, \$40)

Michter's Barrel Strength U.S. 1 Rye

The forebear of Michter's was Shenk's, built in 1753 in eastern Pennsylvania. Several owners later it shuttered in 1989, but a new owner sourced whiskey elsewhere to bottle under the label. Now the company has its own Kentucky distillery. The barrel-strength version is notable for its range of orange peel, vanilla, cinnamon graham cracker, mint and toffee. The Inch's coconut bloomed in the pairing. Michter's drew fruit notes from the Rocky Patel and developed its own licorice. (113 proof, \$80)

Old Overholt

Old Overholt has survived the many travails of rye whiskey since its inception in 1810. During Prohibition, it sold for medicinal purposes only. Its plant shuttered during World War II. In the 1980s it moved from western Pennsylvania to Kentucky. Still it remains as one of rye's best buys, with its surprising range of blackberries, cherries, marzipan, cinnamon, licorice and toast with jam. It balanced delicately with the Inch, showing white pepper and giving up fruit to the cigar. The RP's spices contrasted well with the berries. (80 proof, \$19)

Pikesville Straight Rye

Originally made in Maryland (and now at Kentucky's Heaven Hill), Pikesville is the exemplar of the mild, eastern style. The rye portion of the mashbill just clears the minimum 51 percent standard. This superpremium version is six years old. Along with rye toast and clove, it features rich, gooey caramel with a topping of raspberry jam. Its caramel filled out the Inch, while pairing the Pikesville with the Rocky Patel smacked of cinnamon toast. (110 proof, \$50)

Redemption Rye

Among a spate of non-distilling producers who source their rye from the MGP distillery in Indiana, Redemption is refreshingly the most transparent about it. This two-and-a-half-year-old is an interesting mix of sugar, menthol, herbs and spices, topped with flowers. It drew fuller body from the Inch, but received little in return. The Rocky Patel combination was quite spicy and a good backdrop for Redemption's flowers. (90 proof, \$30)

Rittenhouse Bottled In Bond

Rittenhouse was founded in Philadelphia in 1934 to slake the nation's thirst at the end of Prohibition. Starting as a two-year-old, it gradually grew up to its four-year, bottled-in-bond status. With notes of toffee and vanilla, fruit flavors, mint, pepper, rye bread and cloves, the whiskey suffuses the Inch with sweetness and gets added spice in return. With the Rocky Patel, the two become a spicy mint gumball. (100 proof, \$25)



Russell's Reserve 6 Year Old Rye

This is the product of the Wild Turkey distillery, more famous for Bourbon. The name refers to the father-and-son distilling team of Jimmy and Eddie Russell who created this small-batch whiskey. The flavors are a crisp balance of honey and tang, with caramel, butter rum, cinnamon, rye bread and slight fruits. It brought depth and pleasant bite to the Inch and found itself filling the Rocky Patel with hearty sweetness. (90 proof, \$35)

Sazerac Rye

The emblematic New Orleans cocktail, the Sazerac, was named for a Cognac brand. Rye replaced brandy in the recipe, but the Sazerac name stuck. It was even applied to a coffeehouse, which grew into a spirits giant that now makes Sazerac Rye, a very zingy whiskey. It tussled a bit with the Inch, but had a happy boost of spice with the Rocky Patel. (90 proof, \$27)

Templeton Rye 4 Years Old

Fans of "Boardwalk Empire" may recognize Templeton from its cameos on the HBO series set in Prohibition. The whiskey has been made in Indiana since its introduction, but a distillery is being built in the Iowa town it is named for. It shows mint, dill, clove, rye toast and plums. The Inch drew butterscotch from the whiskey and got roasty. The Rocky pairing was neutral, with the Inch cigar getting rough with the rye. (80 proof, \$30)

Whistlepig The Boss Hog Independent

This Whistlepig has it backwards. Lots of Scotch ages in American casks. This is whiskey sourced in Canada and finished in Scottish hogsheads. The whiskey, with a 100-percent-rye mashbill, shows fruit, spice and menthol, with gingerbread, fruitcake, minced pudding and licorice. It was a bit too tannic for the Inch, though it lent spice. With the Rocky Patel, it found superb balance, each filling in spice notes for the other. (120.6 proof, \$300) ❖

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What seemed like a fad has become an important part of the cigar market—cigars with ring gauges of 60, 70 or even fatter. Senior editor Greg Mottola weighs in on the subject.
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Cuba's former leader, who gave birth to the Cohiba cigar brand, died in November.
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For much more on cigars, see our Top 25 coverage beginning on page 46.



churchills

Stately Churchills are fine smokes, with approachable ring gauges and considerable length, which combine for a cigar experience that lasts and satisfies. The Cuban standard calls for a ring gauge of 47 and a length of 7 inches, but non-Cuban Churchills can be fatter. Our top score went to the cigar that has long defined the category, the Romeo y Julieta Churchill. While some RyJ Churchills from the early 2000s were disappointing, recent examples have been stellar. A second Cuban Churchill, the H. Upmann Sir Winston, was among our 91-pointers, joining a Foundry and a Dominican Montecristo. This was a strong category—no cigar scored lower than 87 points.



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 47 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: JULY 2015

ROMEO Y JULIETA CHURCHILL

Draped in a golden-brown wrapper, this cigar weaves delicate notes of orange peel and almond with floral intonations and a touch of chocolate. An elegant cigar.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £24.26

92



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 7 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

FOUNDRY TIME FLIES 54725

A dark, beautiful Churchill with a gleaming, reddish-brown wrapper. It has a rich, bold core of coffee bean character framed by sweet touches of caramel, cinnamon and licorice.
U.S.: \$8.50 U.K.: N/A

91



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 47 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: OCTOBER 2013

H. UPMANN SIR WINSTON

Rich and refined, this cigar elegantly layers notes of nutmeg and clove with sweet spices and graham cracker. All come together for a delicious Christmas-cake effect.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £30.15

91



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

MONTECRISTO WHITE CHURCHILL

Sweet and mild with a creamy smoke redolent of honey, ginger and freshly ground pepper. Its wrapper is yellowish in color and the cigar burns and draws evenly.
U.S.: \$12.53 U.K.: N/A

91



HONDURAS

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: HONDURAS, DOM. REP.
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

CAMACHO CRIOLLO CHURCHILL

A tawny-colored Churchill with a lush draw that imparts salty, briny smoke accentuated by notes of earth and black pepper. The finish carries fruity, mineral qualities.
U.S.: \$7.75 U.K.: N/A

90



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

H. UPMANN 1844 RESERVE CHURCHILL

An earthy, savory cigar with notes of rock salt that become toasty and nutty before a slightly dry finish.
U.S.: \$7.79 U.K.: N/A

89

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

OLIVA SERIE O MADURO CHURCHILL

Draped in a dark and streaky wrapper, this Churchill offers primarily cedary impressions with a touch of apple and caramel. The finish is short and woody.
U.S.: \$8.07 U.K.: N/A

89

**HONDURAS**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: MEXICO

PADILLA VINTAGE RESERVE CHURCHILL

A dark, neatly pressed Churchill wearing a three-seam cap. Notes of coffee and wood underscore sweeter impressions of vanilla and maple syrup. A medium-bodied cigar.
U.S.: \$7.75 U.K.: N/A

89

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP., MEXICO
BINDER: MEXICO
WRAPPER: CAMEROON

PARTAGAS FABULOSO

An oaky, woody Churchill whose lush draw also imparts herbal notes and a dried-pear sweetness. A medium-bodied smoke from first to last puffs.
U.S.: \$8.99 U.K.: N/A

89

**HONDURAS**

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP., HONDURAS
BINDER: BRAZIL
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ROOM 101 DARUMA SUCIO

This well-made cigar burns evenly, showing notes of earth, honey and a touch of green tea. There are hints of peppermint on the finish.
U.S.: \$10.40 U.K.: N/A

89

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

DIAMOND CROWN MAXIMUS CHURCHILL NO. 2

A dark Churchill with a veiny, streaky wrapper and even draw. It's an earthy, zesty cigar that delivers a dense, chewy smoke. The finish is woody with a touch of anise.
U.S.: \$16.60 U.K.: N/A

88

**HONDURAS**

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

ROMEO Y JULIETA RESERVE CHURCHILL

The tawny wrapper of this Churchill is devoid of oils. Its airy draw brings notes of earth and pepper with hints of vanilla on the short, charry finish.
U.S.: \$6.86 U.K.: N/A

88

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 49 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP., BRAZIL
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

1907 BY DUNHILL CHURCHILL

A bit rumpled in appearance, this cigar is notably woody with an underlying bitterness. Hints of nuts, earth and floral notes also come through.
U.S.: \$10.80 U.K.: N/A

87

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

LA AROMA DE CUBA CHURCHILL

The porous wrapper gives this dark Churchill a slightly gritty appearance. It's a woody, earthy smoke with some faint leathery notes and a raw cacao finish.
U.S.: \$6.50 U.K.: N/A

87

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corona gordas

Corona gordas, also known as toros, have soared in popularity in recent years, especially in the United States. Every cigar brand seems to include one in its portfolio. We were quite impressed by a newer toro, the Espinosa Habano No. 4, made at the small but noteworthy La Zona Cigars factory in Nicaragua. It scored 92 points, the best score in the category. Close behind, at 91 points, was one of Cuba's Edición Limitada cigars for 2016, the Romeo y Julieta Capuletos, followed by a trio of 90-pointers, including the very late and long-awaited Montecristo 80 Aniversario from Cuba. Note the price on the Fonseca Nicaragua. It's a 90-point cigar that retails for a mere \$5.99 before taxes.



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: ECUADOR
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

ESPINOSA HABANO NO. 4

Complex, elegant notes of tea and caramel mingle on the palate with touches of black pepper before a creamy, vanilla bean finish that hints of orange peel.
U.S.: \$6.75 U.K.: N/A

92



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 53 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: JUNE 2016

ROMEO Y JULIETA CAPULETOS EDICIÓN LIMITADA 2016

Enrobed in a reddish-brown cover leaf, this cigar's creamy smoke shows elements of wood, spice and cocoa powder, buttressed by a floral undertone.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £30.50

91



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

FONSECA NICARAGUA TORO

There's an oily wrapper on this dark, well-made cigar. Notes of toast and hickory are complemented by touches of tropical fruit and red wine.
U.S.: \$5.99 U.K.: N/A

90



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 55 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: DECEMBER 2015

MONTECRISTO 80 ANIVERSARIO

Rolled with a toothy wrapper and a three-seam cap, this large cigar shows an oaky quality that leads to notes of black tea, spice and a toasty finish hinting of licorice.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £40.00

90



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: DOM. REP.

ROMEO BY ROMEO Y JULIETA AGING ROOM SMALL BATCH F25 CAPRICCIO

Dark and veiny on the surface, this cigar draws and burns evenly, offering notes of saffron, coffee bean and spice before a predominantly oaky finish. A bold smoke.
U.S.: \$12.25 U.K.: N/A

90



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS,
BRAZIL
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

BELLAS ARTES ROBUSTO EXTRA

Softly pressed with rounded edges, this cigar smokes evenly, delivering woody, nutty impressions with touches of dried strawberries before a nougat finish.
U.S.: \$8.75 U.K.: N/A

89



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

L'ATELIER CÔTE D'OR LA TÂCHE 2016

Dark and oily in appearance with a chocolate-hued wrapper. Initial toasty, nutty notes take on a cocoa, mineral character before an earthy, gritty finish.
U.S.: \$16.00 U.K.: N/A

89



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 5 5/8"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: DOM. REP.

FUENTE FUENTE OPUSX ANGEL'S SHARE FUENTE FUENTE

A tawny cigar with a triple cap. Its lush draw shows big notes of cedar and spice that mingle with hints of graham cracker and dried fruit. The finish is a bit tangy.
U.S.: \$11.70 U.K.: N/A

88



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

HERRERA ESTELI TORO (TUBO)

An attractive toro with a clean, matte wrapper. It smokes evenly, offering a bright smoke full of citrus and minty notes. The finish is short and woody.
U.S.: \$11.50 U.K.: N/A

88



HONDURAS

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: CAMEROON

ROCKY PATEL VINTAGE 2003 TORO

Wearing a rustic brown wrapper, this long cigar shows notes of caramel, coffee and a hint of spice before leading to a dry, woody finish.
U.S.: \$10.10 U.K.: N/A

88



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

VILLIGER SAN'DORO CLARO TORO

A yellowish toro whose wheaty, straw-and-hay character picks up intensity to show floral notes, some spice and a coconut finish. Mild and easygoing.
U.S.: \$8.50 U.K.: N/A

88



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: MEXICO

HAMMER + SICKLE TRADEMARK SERIES MADURO TORO

Though the draw is slightly firm, this cigar burns evenly, producing a salt-and-pepper ash. Its tangy, woody notes have a raisin sweetness that lead to a musty finish.
U.S.: \$8.99 U.K.: N/A

87



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: BRAZIL, DOM. REP.
BINDER: BRAZIL
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

DAVIDOFF ESCRURIO CORONA GORDA

A dark and oily corona gorda crafted with a flat head. The cigar burns a bit hot at times as notes of wood, coconut and licorice emerge before a bitter finish.
U.S.: \$15.90 U.K.: N/A

86



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

HENRY CLAY BREVAS FINAS

The smoke from this veiny and rustic-looking cigar layers the palate with impressions of bread, charcoal and bitter woods. Off notes and a very dry finish affected the score.
U.S.: \$6.25 U.K.: N/A

84

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to Partagás legend Ramón Cifuentes.

Despite fleeing Cuba penniless, Ramón Cifuentes carried his love of tobacco with him. With determination that was only rivaled by his passion, he soon reinvented his most beloved brand, Partagás. To honor his relentless spirit, we're pleased to introduce Partagás Ramón y Ramón. Based on original heirloom seeds from his time, Ramón y Ramón is a fitting tribute to the man who made Partagás what it is today.

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SURGEON GENERAL WARNING: Tobacco
Smoke Increases The Risk Of Lung Cancer
And Heart Disease, Even In Nonsmokers

figurados

Our top-scoring cigar in this blind tasting is the Ashton Symmetry Belicoso, a sweet and complex smoke crafted by the Fuente family in the Dominican Republic. It sits atop a particularly impressive group of shaped cigars, 10 of which scored 90 points or higher. (The highest scorers, no doubt, will qualify to compete in 2017's Top 25 Cigars of the Year contest.) A second Fuente smoke was right behind the Ashton, the Arturo Fuente Rosado Sungrown Magnum R Vitola "Fifty-Eight." Both of those smokes are made with Ecuadoran wrappers. Cuba's near-identical twins, the Diplomaticos No. 2 and Montecristo No. 2, scored 92 points, as did a newer Joya de Nicaragua cigar.



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ASHTON SYMMETRY BELICOSO

First puffs of this attractive figurado deliver big notes of black cherry and spicy cinnamon. The smoke takes on toastier elements, with impressions of almonds, vanilla and coffee bean.

U.S.: \$12.25 U.K.: N/A

93



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 58 LENGTH: 5 1/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ARTURO FUENTE ROSADO SUNGROWN MAGNUM R VITOLA "FIFTY-EIGHT"

A fat torpedo wearing a chocolate-colored wrapper. Its chewy smoke delivers a cedary core layered with molasses and honey over hearty wood. Rich and balanced.

U.S.: \$8.95 U.K.: N/A

92



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: JUNE 2016

DIPLOMATICOS NO. 2

Floral and woody, this torpedo that becomes rich with nuttiness and vanilla notes. The draw and burn remain even throughout.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £20.50

92



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

JOYA DE NICARAGUA CUATRO CINCO RESERVA ESPECIAL TORPEDO

Box-pressed with a full draw and wavy burn that evens out. The cigar starts sweet with hints of molasses that segue into spicier elements and big notes of hickory.

U.S.: \$12.50 U.K.: N/A

92



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: JULY 2015

MONTECRISTO NO. 2

A gorgeous torpedo that leaves bold, precise impressions of hickory, leather and earth, balanced by touches of peppermint and an oaky, chocolatey finish.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £24.70

92



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 55 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

SUBLIMES TORPEDO

A figurado with a slightly tight draw and even burn. Leather and coffee notes are supported by hints of nuts and orange peel with a touch of chocolate on the finish.

U.S.: \$9.50 U.K.: N/A

91

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/8"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: DOM. REP.

DAVIDOFF YAMASÁ PIRAMIDES

Wearing a dark and alluring wrapper, this torpedo burns evenly. Earthy, woody impressions are balanced by a toasty quality and cocoa powder sweetness.
U.S.: \$23.00 U.K.: N/A

90

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LA AROMA DE CUBA EDICION ESPECIAL NO. 5

This dark figurado has a firm draw that delivers lots of smoke. Bold notes of leather and anise are interwoven with spicier impressions of pepper, cardamom and sassafras.
U.S.: \$7.75 U.K.: N/A

90

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

MATILDE QUADRATA TORPEDO

This box-pressed belicoso smokes well, offering bold notes of coffee and toast with cayenne spice and a toffee sweetness. The finish has a touch of acidity.
U.S.: \$9.00 U.K.: N/A

90

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

MONTECRISTO PILOTICO PEPE MENDEZ NO. 2

A box-pressed pyramid draped in a medium claro wrapper. Roasted coffee notes and woody intonations carry a slight molasses sweetness before the charcoal finish.
U.S.: \$17.60 U.K.: N/A

89

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

DAVIDOFF COLORADO CLARO SPECIAL T

The pointy head of this figurado has a dramatic taper. First puffs are intense with damp mushroom notes that dissipate to show coffee, earth and a hazelnut finish.
U.S.: \$22.50 U.K.: N/A

88

**CUBA**

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: FEBRUARY 2015

SANCHO PANZA BELICOSO

A slightly pressed torpedo rolled with a rough and veiny wrapper. The cigar smokes well, offering sweet and nutty notes that meld with herbal elements before a dry, woody finish.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £18.56

88

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: DOM. REP., BRAZIL, ECUADOR
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. SHADE

LA AURORA PREFERIDOS 1903 EDICION SAPPHIRE PERFECTO

Shaped like a classic perfecto, this well-rolled cigar draws and burns evenly. It's a salty smoke, with notes of dry wood and a light, tea-like finish.
U.S.: \$20.00 U.K.: N/A

87

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 7 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: MEXICO
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

NICA RUSTICA BELLY

An unusually long torpedo with an uncut foot and soft spots throughout the cigar. Though there are some hints of sweetness, a bitter finish and serious combustion issues hurt the score.
U.S.: \$8.18 U.K.: N/A

84

grandes

Every trip into your corner brick-and-mortar cigar shop is a reminder that cigars are getting fatter. This category shows that fat cigars can sometimes be great cigars. Our tasting of 60-ring smokes delivered a half dozen ratings of 90 points or higher. At the top of the category we had a four-way tie for best score with 91 points. Familiar names Punch Signature, Undercrown Shade and Nat Sherman Metropolitan were joined by a newcomer, La Galera, which is rolled in the Dominican Republic. You'll note the absence of Cuban cigars from this review, as for right now, only the extremely limited Cohiba 50 Aniversario meets these dimensions. For more on fat cigars, turn to page 136.



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LA GALERA HABANO PILONES

A fat cigar with a lush draw and even burn. Profoundly nutty impressions are balanced by touches of sweet nougat, cedar and coffee. The finish hints of licorice.
U.S.: \$8.20 U.K.: N/A

91



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

NAT SHERMAN METROPOLITAN SELECTION HABANO GORDO

Draped in an oily wrapper, this fat cigar has a lush draw that offers big notes of roasted nuts, coffee bean and caramel. The finish is toasty and leathery.
U.S.: \$7.25 U.K.: N/A

91



HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: U.S.A./CONN. HABANO
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

PUNCH SIGNATURE GIGANTE

The leathery, cedary aspects of this dark, fat cigar are balanced by sweet notes of dried fruit and chocolate. The draw is a bit firm. The wrapper on the cigar is striking, and gleaming with oil.
U.S.: \$7.69 U.K.: N/A

91



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

UNDERCROWN SHADE GORDITO

A very fat cigar wrapped in a clean cover leaf. It's a bright and creamy smoke, zesty with touches of lemon peel and dried orange. It's also sweet, with a very prominent note of honey on the palate.
U.S.: \$10.55 U.K.: N/A

91



HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

ALEC BRADLEY TEMPUS NICARAGUA MAGNUS

Big earthy and woody notes underscore pleasing touches of mint, walnut and root beer candy. The finish of this fat cigar is clean.
U.S.: \$9.85 U.K.: N/A

90



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

FLOR DE LAS ANTILLAS TORO GRANDE

A chunky, box-pressed cigar with plenty of rich coffee and fresh tobacco intonations. There's a bit of spice and sweetness as well, though the draw is a bit firm.
U.S.: \$9.20 U.K.: N/A

90

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
 FILLER: NICARAGUA
 BINDER: NICARAGUA
 WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

BRICK HOUSE MIGHTY MIGHTY

This fat, hefty cigar delivers a meaty smoke with some warm, nutty qualities and a touch of tart fruits. The finish is a bit gritty.
 U.S.: \$6.75 U.K.: N/A

89

**HONDURAS**

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
 FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA
 BINDER: NICARAGUA
 WRAPPER: MEXICO

H. UPMANN RESERVE MADURO TITAN

Very rustic in appearance, this thick cigar produces a flaky ash as it burns. It's a primarily nutty smoke with touches of black pepper, cola and a mesquite finish.
 U.S.: \$8.13 U.K.: N/A

89

**HONDURAS**

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
 FILLER: DOM. REP., HONDURAS, NICARAGUA
 BINDER: HONDURAS
 WRAPPER: HONDURAS

MACANUDO INSPIRADO ORANGE GIGANTE

Sweet and fruity with rich tobacco notes, this thick cigar imparts an underlying toastiness, but an airy draw and thin smoke affected the score.
 U.S.: \$7.19 U.K.: N/A

88

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 4 3/4"
 FILLER: NICARAGUA
 BINDER: NICARAGUA
 WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

CASA MAGNA COLORADO TORITO

A dark, fat robusto with earthy, floral qualities and a woody finish. This medium- to full-bodied cigar draws and burns evenly.
 U.S.: \$7.15 U.K.: N/A

87

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
 FILLER: DOM. REP.
 BINDER: NICARAGUA
 WRAPPER: ECUADOR

KRISTOFF CONNECTICUT 6X60

Large and imposing, this cigar is crafted with a pigtail cap and uncut foot. Impressions of vanilla, cream and a tangy fruit emerge before a finish that hints of raisins.
 U.S.: \$9.20 U.K.: N/A

87

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
 FILLER: DOM. REP.
 BINDER: DOM. REP.
 WRAPPER: ECUADOR

PDR 1878 CAPA SUN GROWN DOUBLE MAGNUM

There's a slight musty note pervading this reddish, oily cigar, which also shows intonations of earth, wood and vanilla. The draw is open, but the burn, uneven.
 U.S.: \$7.43 U.K.: N/A

87

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 5 7/8"
 FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
 BINDER: NICARAGUA
 WRAPPER: ECUADOR

INCH COLORADO BY E.P. CARRILLO NO. 60

A plump cigar with a neat three-seam cap. Initial notes are a bit soapy before turning herbal and musty with a damp-tasting finish.
 U.S.: \$9.10 U.K.: N/A

86

**HONDURAS**

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
 FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
 BINDER: NICARAGUA
 WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. SHADE

ROCKY PATEL VINTAGE CONNECTICUT 1999 SIXTY

This lightly hued cigar is as mild as it looks, delivering an herbal smoke with faint hints of sugar and tangy wood. The draw is a bit firm.
 U.S.: \$11.75 U.K.: N/A

85

miscellaneous

Some cigars just don't fit into CIGAR AFICIONADO tasting categories. Some are too fat, others are too short, and some are just . . . odd. For that we have our "miscellaneous" category, which we bring out on occasion. At the very top of the list is the consistently superb Padrón Serie 1926 No. 35 Maduro. Don't let its diminutive four-inch length fool you—this cigar pops with distinctive notes of coffee and chocolate, and it's designed to be puffed for about a half an hour, perfect for when time is short. The 1926 in the brand name is for the birth-year of José Orlando Padrón, the company founder, and the No. 35 comes from the amount of time his son Jorge takes to smoke one. An even shorter cigar comes to us via Cuba, the Montecristo Media Corona. It's a mere 3 1/2 inches long, but it earned a score of 90 points, with a pleasant profile. It's among the newer Montes, and it began appearing in the summer of 2015. This is its second time being tasted in CIGAR AFICIONADO magazine, and its second time scoring 90 points. Scores of 90 also went to boutique producers Caldwell, makers of Midnight Express, and Tatuaje.



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

PADRÓN SERIE 1926 NO. 35 MADURO

Smoking this stout, box-pressed cigar is like chewing on chocolate-covered espresso beans—strong, earthy, coffee-like, with a hint of fruity sweetness.
U.S.: \$11.70 U.K.: N/A

92



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 5 3/8"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

MIDNIGHT EXPRESS CORONA

A dark and oily corona topped with a near-perfect pigtail cap. The cigar's easy draw delivers salty, brawny notes of walnut, earth and coffee bean.
U.S.: \$10.00 U.K.: N/A

90



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 3 1/2"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: DECEMBER 2015

MONTECRISTO MEDIA CORONA

Enrobed in a veiny, wrinkled wrapper, this small corona offers a salty, nutty smoke fortified with notes of coffee bean and earthy underpinnings. It tastes better than it looks.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £10.83

90



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 3/8"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

TATUAJE 10TH ANNIVERSARY BON CHASSEUR

Notes of dark chocolate abound in this robusto, which has a closed, uncut foot. Hints of walnut, caraway and raisins precede the mesquite finish.
U.S.: \$10.00 U.K.: N/A

90



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

ASYLUM PREMIUM 44X4

This dark, short little cigar is full of woody and red wine notes that lead to a sweet licorice and maple finish. Medium to full bodied.
U.S.: \$5.76 U.K.: N/A

89

**CUBA**

RING GAUGE: 33 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: JUNE 2015

COHIBA EXQUISITO

Though a bit rough in appearance, this gnarly little cigar imparts a creamy, nutty smoke rich with notes of almonds and salt. Tasty and medium bodied.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £13.92

89**CUBA**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: JANUARY 2016

ROMEO Y JULIETA PETIT CHURCHILL

A squat little cigar crafted with a three-seam cap. Leathery and salty notes are layered with touches of licorice and minerals, but the finish is short.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £16.35

89**HONDURAS**

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 4 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: BRAZIL

CAO BRAZILIA CORCOVADO

Dark and oily in appearance, this short plug of a cigar is nutty and floral with chocolate-like undertones and a slightly bitter finish.

U.S.: \$5.99 U.K.: N/A

88**CUBA**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 4 3/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: SEPTEMBER 2015

PARTAGÁS SERIE D NO. 5

Dry and woody at first, this short robusto takes on an earthy quality with some light touches of sweet vanilla. A mild to medium-bodied smoke.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £17.55

88**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 4 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

ALEC BRADLEY NICA PURO BAJITO

The draw of this robusto is open and substantial, showing a spicy smoke that takes on notes of tart wood, cocoa powder and a touch of licorice.

U.S.: \$6.80 U.K.: N/A

87**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 38 LENGTH: 8"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: DOM. REP.

NAT SHERMAN 1930 SUPER LANCERO

Long and dark, this oily lancero shows a toasty, anise character with hints of fresh tobacco, but the finish is a bit muted.

U.S.: \$15.00 U.K.: N/A

87**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

NUB HABANO 460

A short, fat plug of a cigar with an even, open draw. Initial notes of perfume become woody and sweet, before the dry, nutty finish.

U.S.: \$6.80 U.K.: N/A

87**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

PERDOMO SMALL BATCH SERIES CONNECTICUT HALF CORONA

This blond, short robusto has a mild straw-and-hay character that leads to a notably papery finish.

U.S.: \$5.00 U.K.: N/A

85

robustos

Robustos remain the king of the cigar world. The cigars are short but stout, a size that's more popular than any other, although corona gordas/toros are making a challenge. Our latest review has several robustos that impressed our panel of tasters. The CLE Prieto, from Christian Eiroa, took the top score with 92 points thanks to strong notes of earth and coffee, as well as an even burn and fine draw. Illusione and Padrón 1964 Anniversary Series, two brands that seem to always deliver top marks in our blind tastings, were close behind with 91-point scores. Cuba's Cohiba Robusto, once dubbed "the ultimate power-lunch cigar," scored 90, tying with a Nat Cicco from Nicaragua.



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

CLE PRIETO 50X5
Powerful first puffs of this robusto show a strong earthy and coffee character that mellows a bit to a sweet and nutty smoke. The draw and burn are even.
U.S.: \$7.26 U.K.: N/A

92



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ILLUSIONE GARAGISTE ROBUSTO
Rolled with a three-seam cap, this cigar leaves pleasing notes of juniper, fresh tobacco and spice on the palate. There is a touch of brown sugar sweetness on the finish.
U.S.: \$8.95 U.K.: N/A

91



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 56 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

PADRÓN 1964 ANNIVERSARY SERIES MADURO TORO
The easy draw of this toothy, box-pressed cigar delivers woody, peppery notes, coupled with touches of coffee bean, cocoa and nuts. A rich and complex smoke.
U.S.: \$15.30 U.K.: N/A

91



CUBA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 4 7/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: NOVEMBER 2015

COHIBA ROBUSTO
This well-made robusto has a good draw and dead-even burn. Notes of spice, herbs and gingersnap cookie layer the palate before a rich, chocolaty finish.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £27.76

90



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 56 LENGTH: 5 1/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

NAT CICCO HHB HABANO GOLD ROBUSTO
Crafted with a nipple tip and closed foot, this cigar smokes well, offering sweet and nutty notes that build to bolder impressions of cocoa, coffee bean and a touch of wheat.
U.S.: \$7.00 U.K.: N/A

90



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

EL GALAN RESERVA ESPECIAL AIROSOS
Topped with a three-seam cap, this box-pressed robusto shows notes of earth and coffee with hints of dark chocolate that recur on the finish. Strong but balanced.
U.S.: \$6.67 U.K.: N/A

89

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

MY FATHER CONNECTICUT ROBUSTO

Draped in a tan wrapper, this cigar smokes well, delivering strong impressions of cedar, toast and pepper. There are touches of coffee bean and peppermint on the finish.

U.S.: \$7.70 U.K.: N/A

89**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 4 3/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: DOM. REP.

**AGING ROOM SOLERA DOMINICAN
SUN GROWN FESTIVO**

An oily robusto with a fat pigtail cap. It starts earthy and chalky, hinting at hibiscus tea. Earthiness recurs on the finish with bitter touches of baker's chocolate.

U.S.: \$6.95 U.K.: N/A

88**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

GUARDIAN OF THE FARM JJ

This predominantly woody robusto imparts peppery notes as well with a muted graham cracker sweetness. The cigar is made with a flat head and uncut foot.

U.S.: \$8.50 U.K.: N/A

88**CUBA**

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: JUNE 2015

EL REY DEL MUNDO CHOIX SUPREME

Covered in a spotty wrapper, this is a primarily salty robusto with floral undertones that become a bit perfumey. There's a touch of sweetness on this finish.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £14.86

88**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 4 7/8"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: U.S.A/CONN. BROADLEAF

**LA GLORIA CUBANA SERIE R MADURO
NO. 4**

Near black and topped with a lopsided cap, this cigar shows impressions of earth, licorice and charcoal. The finish is dry, and hints of oak and minerals.

U.S.: \$6.79 U.K.: N/A

88**CUBA**

RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 4 3/4"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: JUNE 2014

VEGUEROS TAPADO

This small robusto has a firm draw and somewhat blistery burn. Woody notes of hickory and oak emerge, with hints of nuts and briny olive. A medium-bodied cigar.

U.S.: N/A ITALY: 4.80 EURO

88**U.S.A.**

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LA PALINA ILLUMINATION ROBUSTO

This oily robusto has an open draw but burns a bit unevenly, showing earthy, leathery impressions with hints of peanut and pepper. The finish is charry.

U.S.: \$11.50 U.K.: N/A

87**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: CAMEROON

**LA FLOR DOMINICANA
CAMEROON CABINET NO. 5**

Woody and muted with vague hints of salt and spice that struggle to emerge. The draw of this medium-bodied cigar is firm.

U.S.: \$8.80 U.K.: N/A

86

Cigars are listed first by country and then by score. Please refer to the main tasting pages for notes and prices.

CIGAR AFICIONADO'S 100-POINT SCALE

Classic
95–100
Outstanding
90–94
Very good to excellent
80–89
Average to good
commercial quality
70–79
Don't waste your money
60–69
Not available
n/a

*Note: all prices are
manufacturers' suggested
retail, before taxes.*

CUBA

92	Diplomaticos No. 2
92	Montecristo No. 2
92	Romeo y Julieta Churchill
91	H. Upmann Sir Winston
91	Romeo y Julieta Capuletos Edición Limitada 2016
90	Cohiba Robusto
90	Montecristo 80 Aniversario
90	Montecristo Media Corona
89	Cohiba Exquisito
89	Romeo y Julieta Petit Churchill
88	El Rey del Mundo Choix Supreme
88	Partagás Serie D No. 5
88	Sancho Panza Belicoso
88	Vegueros Tapado

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

93	Ashton Symmetry Belicoso
92	Arturo Fuente Rosado Sungrown Magnum R Vitola "Fifty-Eight"
91	La Galera Habano Pilonos
91	Montecristo White Churchill
91	Nat Sherman Metropolitan Selection Habano Gordo
90	Davidoff Yamasá Piramides
90	Matilde Quadrata Torpedo
90	Midnight Express Corona
90	Romeo by Romeo y Julieta Aging Room Small Batch F25 Capriccio
89	H. Upmann 1844 Reserve Churchill
89	Montecristo Pilotico Pepe Mendez No. 2
89	Partagas Fabuloso
88	Aging Room Solera Dominican Sun Grown Festivo
88	Davidoff Colorado Claro Special T
88	Diamond Crown Maximus Churchill No. 2
88	Fuente Fuente OpusX Angel's Share Fuente Fuente
88	La Gloria Cubana Serie R Maduro No. 4
87	1907 By Dunhill Churchill
87	Hammer + Sickle Trademark Series Maduro Toro
87	Kristoff Connecticut 6x60
87	La Aurora Preferidos 1903 Edicion Sapphire Perfecto
87	Nat Sherman 1930 Super Lancero
87	PDR 1878 Capa Sun Grown Double Magnum
86	Davidoff Escurio Corona Gorda
86	Inch Colorado by E.P. Carrillo No. 60
86	La Flor Dominicana Cameroon Cabinet No. 5
84	Henry Clay Brevas Finas

HONDURAS

91	Punch Signature Gigante
90	Alec Bradley Tempus Nicaragua Magnus
90	Camacho Criollo Churchill
89	H. Upmann Reserve Maduro Titan
89	Padilla Vintage Reserve Churchill
89	Room 101 Daruma Sucio
88	CAO Brazilia Corcovado
88	Macanudo Inspirado Orange Gigante
88	Rocky Patel Vintage 2003 Toro
88	Romeo y Julieta Reserve Churchill
85	Rocky Patel Vintage Connecticut 1999 Sixty

NICARAGUA

92	CLE Prieto 50x5
92	Espinosa Habano No. 4
92	Joya de Nicaragua Cuatro Cinco Reserva Especial Torpedo
92	Padrón Serie 1926 No. 35 Maduro
91	Foundry Time Flies 54725
91	Illusione Garagiste Robusto
91	Padrón 1964 Anniversary Series Maduro Toro
91	Sublimes Torpedo
91	Undercrown Shade Gordito
90	Flor de las Antillas Toro Grande
90	Fonseca Nicaragua Toro
90	La Aroma de Cuba Edicion Especial No. 5
90	Nat Cicco HHB Habano Gold Robusto
90	Tatuaje 10th Anniversary Bon Chasseur
89	Asylum Premium 44x4
89	Bellas Artes Robusto Extra
89	Brick House Mighty Mighty
89	El Galan Reserva Especial Airosos
89	L'Atelier Côte d'or La Tâche 2016
89	My Father Connecticut Robusto
89	Oliva Serie O Maduro Churchill
88	Guardian of the Farm JJ
88	Herrera Esteli Toro (Tubo)
88	Villiger San'Doro Claro Toro
87	Alec Bradley Nica Puro Bajito
87	Casa Magna Colorado Torito
87	La Aroma de Cuba Churchill
87	Nub Habano 460
85	Perdomo Small Batch Series Connecticut Half Corona
84	Nica Rustica Belly

U.S.A.

87	La Palina Illumination Robusto
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connoisseur's corner

From slim to fat, from short to extra long, this edition of Connoisseur's Corner covers the size extremes of the cigar world. The Sancho Panza Sancho is an "A," Cuba's longest standard cigar size. The smoke measures 9 1/4 inches long by 47 ring gauge, and it can easily take more than two hours to smoke it entirely. It's one of three classics, joining the ultra-slim Partagás Serie du Connaisseur No. 3, which measures 5 5/8 inches by 35 ring, and the Romeo y Julieta Cazadores, 6 3/8 by 44. Each cigar was quite different, but each showcased the aging potential of great Cuban tobacco. The oldest cigar in the list, a pre-Castro H. Upmann, exhibited a delicate array of sweet spices. And the shortest, the corona-sized Cohiba Siglo II, had wonderful notes of coffee beans.



PARTAGÁS SERIE DU CONNAISSEUR NO. 3 (1993)

A wonderful short and slim cigar from the heyday of Cuban tobacco. This sample was taken from its original cedar cabinet box, and the leathery notes of the tobacco have blended perfectly with the light sweet cedar notes. There is a long, light and earthy finish that keeps lingering on the palate. Plenty of years left on this great smoke. —*Gordon Mott*

97



ROMEO Y JULIETA CAZADORES (1994)

Rolled with an incredible flat head, this relatively skinny smoke gives a blast of black pepper on the first puff and an aroma of molasses cookies baking in the oven. Delicate notes of allspice and mace appear before ceding to rich, bold leather with some orange peel, almonds and lingering spice. There's plenty of power left in this one. —*Andrew Nagy*

96



SANCHO PANZA SANCHO (1995)

This immense "A," more than nine inches long and nearly 22 years old, takes greedily to the flame. It's an easygoing cigar that slowly builds in flavor as it goes, taking on considerable notes of baking spices, gingerbread and coffee bean, with honeyed wood on the finish. Lovely, balanced, elegant smoke. —*David Savona*

95



H. UPMANN NACIONALES EMS (CIRCA 1950)

This pre-Castro cigar comes from a box bearing the "EMS," stamp meaning English Market Selection. It has a slightly tapered belicoso tip and natural colorado wrapper. The well-aged cigar is rich, with an easy, light draw. There are plenty of sweet spices on the palate, with clean nutmeg notes and copious amounts of cinnamon. —*Marvin R. Shanken*

94



COHIBA SIGLO II (1995)

This corona, slim and somewhat wrinkled, dark but not extremely so, is all about the wood early on, with little other flavors joining in for quite some time. It takes its time waking up, but after a solid inch, notes of tea emerge, and then a faint but welcome sweetness. The finish smacks of coffee bean and slate, with that persistent dry wood note. —*David Savona*

92



LA GLORIA CUBANA MEDAILLE D'OR NO. 2 (1995)

You don't see many lonsdales like this anymore—dark, oily and solidly rolled. The draw is substantial and lush, the combustion perfect. It's certainly a slow starter but after a few nondescript puffs, it becomes bright and zesty with almond notes and lemon-scented nougat. The creamy smoke envelops the palate. —*Gregory Mottola*

92



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SUPERSIZE

My Cigar

Anything but a fad, the fat cigar trend seems destined to stay

BY GREGORY MOTTOLA
PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFF HARRIS

Everything in America is bigger. Our heavy-handed culture of size is either expressed as a badge of honor or rebuked as a gaudy sign of excess. McMansions, Big Gulps, Hummers and Mega-churches are all oversized emblems of American appetites. And now, in keeping with this American tradition, premium cigars have become thicker, fatter and larger than ever.

Over the last 10 years, many premium cigar manufacturers have stopped producing coronas, lanceros and other slim sizes formerly associated with the gentlemanly art of smoking. Outside of niche markets, they simply don't sell like they used to. Today, the consumer's preference for heft has forced every cigar manufacturer to make thick, fat cigars in sizes and proportions that would have been laughable a few decades ago.





Although self-styled connoisseurs will never miss an opportunity to disparage this fairly new trend, these disgruntled smokers are now nothing more than the vocal minority. They can protest all they want—the trend is only growing and it's probably here to stay.

If you go back 20 years, a cigar with a ring gauge of 46 was considered on the larger side. This is no longer the case. By today's standards, 46 is a small smoke. Even robustos, which tend to have ring gauges of 50, look diminutive compared with today's giants. Many companies won't even produce a cigar with less than a 50 ring gauge, and the reason for this is simple—consumers are focusing on ever fatter cigars.

"You can't give panetelas away," says Jeff Borysiewicz, owner of Corona Cigar Co. in Orlando, Florida. "Coronas and lonsdales sell, but slowly. When we look at bringing a line of cigars in, we are going to stock the top five sizes and coronas and lonsdales usually won't make that cut."

What does make the cut is a format that's been dubbed the "6 by 60," which measures 6 inches by 60 ring gauge, making it close to one inch in diameter. Most new cigar lines include at least one cigar with a 6-by-60 dimension, and some cigars are even fatter. A few cigarmakers have gone as large as 70 ring gauge, and a few more are pushing the fat cigar category into 80 ring territory—that's about as thick as the cardboard tube you'd find inside a roll of paper towels. Standard toros and robustos start to look much smaller by comparison.

These cigars are untraditional, so there is no official name for the size from the history books. When CIGAR AFICIONADO added the 6-by-60 category to its tasting format in the December 2012 issue, it dubbed the size "Grandes." The popularity has continued, and now these fat smokes are familiar sights in humidors.

The trend didn't happen overnight. But one could point to a few cigarmakers who quietly ushered in the big cigars over the last 20 years, bringing the huge smokes into the mainstream without knowing it would affect the market in years to come.

If there is a godfather of large-ring-gauge cigars, it has to be Ernesto Perez-Carrillo, the owner of EPC Cigar Co. and the former owner of the La Gloria Cubana brand. Sure, large ring gauges existed before he came to prominence, but Perez-Carrillo was the first to normalize the 6 by 60 with La Gloria Cubana Serie R, a nationally recognizable brand created in the late 1990s that enjoyed broad distribution and respect among serious smokers.

"I created the Serie R in 1997 or 1998 after I moved my operation from Miami to the Dominican Republic," recalls Perez-Carrillo. "The Serie R came in two sizes, a 52 ring gauge and a 54. During a meeting back in 2000, I said, 'Why don't we come out with a 60 ring gauge?' I got the idea from some old cigar molds I had laying around the factory. Some were 58 and some were 60. First we put out the Serie R No. 6, which was 6 by 60. And then the No. 7, which was 7 by 58. Big cigars."

The way Perez-Carrillo remembers, the new, huge cigars were an instant success, surpassing the previous sizes almost instantly.

"The consumers fell in love with these sizes," he says. "I think that they were ready to accept a 6 by 60."

The Serie R wasn't Perez-Carrillo's first foray into large ring gauges. In his earlier days, when he made all of his La Gloria Cubanas in a small, cramped shop in Miami, he was dabbling in the strange art of bulky vitolas for his custom clients.

"We had customers that would ask for big ring gauges," he explains. "We wouldn't make La Glorias in that size—the biggest La Gloria at the time was 52—but we had a house blend that we'd use for the custom jobs. There were these bikers that wanted us to make a 666 cigar—6 inches with a 66 ring gauge. I even made a 9 by 70 for someone. That was in 1980 or '81."

If Perez-Carrillo is responsible for bringing the bulky dimensions to the premium cigar mainstream, the seeds were sown years before by Rolando Reyes Sr., who once owned and ran Cuba Aliados Cigars.



The sadistic and unapologetic Max Cady, played by Robert De Niro in 1991's *Cape Fear*, was an early adopter of the fat cigar trend.



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Some may recall the gargantuan proportions of a cigar named The Chief. Made by Puros Indios in the 1980s, the hulking cigar measured 18 inches long, needed two wrapper leaves to cover its enormous form, and was rolled with a 66 ring gauge. The size first appeared under the Cuba Aliados brand as The General. It wasn't the only massive smoke made by Reyes, who also had a 7 1/4-by-64-inch figurado called Piramide No. 1, and the 10-by-60 Grand Victoria.

"In the old days, our big cigars weren't really big sellers, with the exception of the Piramides, The Chief and The General," says Carlos Diez, grandson of the late Reyes and now the president of Reyes Family Cigars (formerly Puros Indios). "The Chief and General were always big sellers because of the novelty aspect. In the early 2000s, my grandfather Rolando Reyes Sr. let me come up with different variations of large ring gauges like the Gordo (6 by 60), Bronco (6 1/2 by 54) and the Corona Gorda No. 5 (5 1/2 by 64)."

Other big cigars existed in the years before the modern-day cigar boom. Matasa Cigars (today known as Quesada) has long made a gigantic cigar known as the Casa Blanca Jeroboam, measuring 10 inches long by 66 ring gauge. Robert De Niro's character puffed on the "smaller" version in a movie theater in the 1991 remake of *Cape Fear*, the 5 inch by 66 ring gauge Half Jeroboam. But those cigars were still regarded as a novelty with a niche following.

The late Stanford Newman of J.C. Newman Cigar Co. had a more subtle approach to bringing larger ring gauges into the mainstream premium cigar market. In 1995, he created a line of cigars called Diamond Crown, which celebrated the company's 100th anniversary—and every size had a 54 ring gauge. The lengths differed, and the blend wasn't particularly strong, but every cigar in the line was thick and weighty with a lot of tobacco. By Newman's thinking, the relatively large 54 ring gauge would allow for blending six or seven leaves, ensuring that the blend was full of flavor. The cigars were made by the Fuentes in the Dominican Republic. In 1995, a 54 ring gauge wasn't very common.

"Everyone thought my father Stanford was crazy to create such a large cigar," recalls Eric Newman of J.C. Newman. When the brand debuted in Beverly Hills, it was only available on the West Coast as a sort of regional specialty. It eventually spread east.

"Shortly after we released our Diamond Crown cigars, the trend for big ring gauges started to catch on," says Newman. As Diamond Crown grew in popularity, it also grew in girth. J.C. Newman expanded the line with the No. 8, a torpedo that upped the thickness to 58 ring gauge and a shapely figurado that bulged out to a 60 ring gauge at its fattest point near the foot.

Oddly enough, J.C. Newman never released Diamond Crown in a standard 6-by-60 format. Rather, the company turned to Nicaragua in 2009 after the trend clearly started to take hold.

"Our first 6 by 60 was the El Batón Double Toro, which was a hit from the start," Newman explains. Made in Nicaragua, El Batón was originally one of J.C. Newman's vintage nickel cigar brands from 1914, handmade at the company's Cleveland, Ohio factory using Cuban tobacco. The Newmans resurrected the brand giving cigar smokers another line of plump smokes (nothing under 54 ring gauge), but at a value price.

"We put out our second 6 by 60 in the Brick House line," he says. Released in 2010, it was called Mighty Mighty. "It's still the best-selling

A TIMELINE OF FAT RING GAUGE CIGARS

1987

Honduran brand Cuba Aliados releases a novelty cigar called The General, an 18-inch-long, 66-ring-gauge cigar.

1994

Puros Indios, a subsidiary of Cuba Aliados, creates The Chief, which is the same size as The General. It's still largely a novelty cigar but develops a following.

1995

J.C. Newman celebrates the company's 100th anniversary with a regular-production brand called Diamond Crown. Every size in the line is a minimum of 54 ring gauge—thick for the time.

1997

Ernesto Perez-Carrillo rolls the La Gloria Cubana Serie R, a two-size line with cigars in 52 and 54 ring gauges.

2001

La Gloria Cubana Serie R becomes the first major, nationally distributed premium cigar brand to release a 6-by-60 ring gauge cigar, the No. 6. This marks the normalization of the 6-by-60 format. Puros Indios begins to produce non-novelty cigars that reach or exceed 60 ring.

2004

Tatuaje adds the 60 ring Gran Cojonu to its Miami-made cigars.

2005

A brand with the curious name XL For Men by Oliveros is dedicated to large ring gauges: 52, 55 and 60.

2010

By the end of the millennium's first decade, many major brands, both traditional and modern, have a 60 ring gauge cigar.

2011

Drew Estate dedicates an entire line to 60-ring-gauge cigars called MUWAT, an acronym for My Uzi Weighs A Ton.

2012

CIGAR AFICIONADO adds a new category to its tastings called "Grandes" to accommodate and rate 60 ring-gauge cigars.

2013

The Asylum 13 brand pushes the trend further by releasing a 7-by-70, and then an 8-by-80 format.

2014

The Big Payback by Room101 Cigars follows the growing trend with 7-by-70 and 8-by-80 cigars in its repertoire.

2016

For the first time in history, Cuba produces a commercially available 60-ring-gauge cigar, the Cohiba 50 Aniversario. The limited-edition cigar is packaged in a commemorative humidor.

54

60

70



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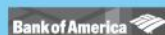


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“There’s so much that can be done with large ring gauges . . . blends you couldn’t do in smaller ring gauges.” —Ernesto Perez-Carrillo

Brick House cigar size to date. I’m glad there are people who want to purchase these cigars. As a manufacturer, it allows for more creativity in the blending process and complexity of flavor.”

Perez-Carrillo agrees. “There’s so much that can be done with large ring gauges,” he says. “So many different types of tobaccos. The format lets you come up with very interesting blends that you simply couldn’t do in smaller ring gauges.”

Not everyone in the industry is enamored of the trend. Hendrik “Henke” Kelner, who’s the tobacco guru for Davidoff of Geneva, acknowledges the blending possibilities, but personally finds the size to be awkward.

“I remember in the ’90s, a ring gauge of 50 was considered large,” he says. “For me, the maximum ring gauge to enjoy comfortably is 54. With larger ring gauges, you have the possibility of using many different tobaccos for complexity, but it requires more care and control in the blending to maintain consistency, especially when the cigar is long. A cigar works like a filter. You need tobaccos of greater strength and adequate distribution.”

Davidoff was not one to dive into the trend. The Swiss company’s large portfolio encompasses many classic sizes that the rest of the premium industry has seemingly marginalized. Coronas, panetelas, lonsdales and lanceros within Davidoff’s repertoire coexist harmoniously with robustos, pyramids and toros. The company has been cautious in regards to the trend, and is not one to load its Davidoff lines with heavy ring gauges. Occasionally, the ring gauge of a Davidoff cigar will make it to 60, but these are restricted to limited-edition releases. Most of Davidoff’s core lines do not exceed 54.

While the vaunted Swiss company won’t allow its Davidoff branded smokes to get too fat, it does loosen the tape measure for its edgier, subsidiary brands like Camacho and Room101.

Nearly every Camacho comes in a 6-by-60 format and Room101 has taken the large-ring-gauge trend to exaggerated heights. Forget, for a moment, its brands like Daruma and Namakubi, which both have 60-ring-gauge varieties. Instead, consider a brand called Room101 The Big Payback—a brand dedicated to extreme parameters. It starts off normal enough with a 50-ring-gauge robusto, but then expands to a size called the Culero, which measures a whopping 7 by 70. If that wasn’t extreme enough, it gets even bigger. The Jaquemate weighs in at 8 by 80.

“This is the super-sizing of the cigar world,” says Room101 owner and creator

Matt Booth. “A good deal of our consumers want what they perceive to be more cigar for their money. You will notice that the price point on such sizes is quite affordable. This is what makes for the ultimate success of an oversized cigar. The taste has to be there, but equally important—if not more so—is the price.”

For Booth, the philosophy was easy: he identified a demand in the market and satisfied it. And he isn’t shy about sharing his personal opinion on the smokes: “they are a perversion of the premium cigar.”

Tom Lazuka isn’t as harsh in his judgment. His Asylum brand, which debuted in 2013, is made in an 80 ring gauge as well. “Just like there are people who enjoy lanceros, there are plenty of guys who enjoy our 70- and 80-ring-gauge cigars,” he offers. “I truly believe it’s a mix of quality and price that drives Asylum and big-ring sales.”

Asylum 13 is offered in sizes so monstrous that a 6-by-60 cigar seems normal by comparison. There’s the 680, which is 6 inches by 80 ring; the 770 (7 by 70); the Super 11/18 (8 by 70) and the 880, which is 8 inches long and 80 ring gauge. One would think such a massive rolling of tobacco might cost a fortune, but the suggested retail price for the 880 is only \$10.43. For an 8-inch cigar as thick as a tailpipe, that’s a lot of tobacco for your money.

Not every heavy-ring-gauge cigar was a hit. Recall a brand called Oliveros XL For Men, which was created by Rafael Nodal and Hank Bischoff of Boutique Blends Cigars (formerly known as Oliveros Cigars). When XL For Men hit the market in 2005, the 6-by-60 format wasn’t quite as common as it is today. The line came in ring gauges of 52, 55 and 60. It was a good cigar, but, in retrospect, the timing wasn’t optimal.

“There are many reasons why XL For Men didn’t catch on,” says Nodal. “First it was way ahead of its time and we did not do a good job marketing the cigar. Also, production wasn’t consistent.”

Like Room101’s The Big Payback, XL For Men was a small cigar line dedicated to only heavy ring gauges, but according to Nodal, the bad timing was the major reason for its demise.

“Imagine in 2005: big ring gauges, a five-country blend, painted boxes and a funky name. That might seem completely normal today, but back then?”

In 12 years, Nodal has come to better understand the market and has more strategically placed his large-ring-gauge cigars within his most successful brands. Cigars such as Aging Room M356ii, La Bohème and Swag all have 60-ring-gauge sizes, and in some cases, 70-ring-gauge cigars within the line.

Of course, a few other producers nudged along the trend. Recall in 2004 Tatuaje’s Gran Cojonu, which was a 60-ring-gauge smoke before



Portly cigars are being rolled all across the cigar globe. From left, the Dominican Inch by E.P. Carrillo, Cuba’s Cohiba 50 Aniversario and the Nicaraguan MUWAT by Drew Estate.

The CAO Flathead V770 Big Block from General Cigar Co. makes 60-ring-gauge-cigars look small with its massive 70 ring gauge dimensions—more than one inch in diameter.

the trend took hold. And in 2011, Drew Estate came out with MUWAT, a cigar line of mostly 60-ring-gauge smokes. Then in 2014, the trend reached surreal proportions. A small company called RomaCraft unveiled a cigar called The CroMagnon Femur. It's 10 inches long by an absurdly large 133 1/3 ring gauge and weighs nearly half a pound. Femurs were intended to be more of a showpiece than anything—a novelty—but a few thrill-seeking smokers lit them up anyway.

Rumors throughout the industry tend to circulate regarding the quality of tobacco stuffed into a 60-, 70- or even 80-ring-gauge cigar. Critics and skeptical smokers believe that cigar makers can get away with sneaking subpar tobacco into a heavy-ring-gauge cigar by masking it with stronger tobaccos. In other words, there's plenty of room in a wide cigar to skimp on quality and nobody's going to notice. At least, that's the thinking behind the suspicion. But the scores of heavy-ring-gauge cigars at CIGAR AFICIONADO don't confirm that theory.

The most notable example is the CAO Flathead V660 Carb, which measures 6 inches by 60 ring gauge. It was the No. 3 cigar of 2015, scoring 95 points. And to accentuate its thickness, the cigar is seriously box pressed, which makes it appear even more massive. Of course, CAO Flathead comes in a 70 ring gauge as well, making the Carb's blocky proportions seem almost unapproachable. It's a gutsy blend that starts with a dark Connecticut broadleaf wrapper, a Cuban-seed binder also grown in Connecticut and a combination of Nicaraguan ligero and Dominican Piloto Cubano tobacco. The right combination of blend and girth made it the highest scoring 6-by-60 cigar ever awarded by this magazine.

The CAO brand is owned by General Cigar Co., which is one of the largest premium cigar companies in the world, and also owns an extensive portfolio of heritage brands like Partagas, Cohiba, Macanudo and Punch that it produces for the U.S. market with non-Cuban tobacco. General doesn't need to be convinced that big cigars are big sellers—all of its major brands now have at least one 6-by-60 cigar within the size chart. Altadis U.S.A., the other cigar behemoth, makes a 6 by 60 in its heritage brands like Montecristo, Romeo y Julieta 1875 and H. Upmann. Like General, these were originally Cuban brands that have parallel counterparts made in the Dominican Republic without any Cuban tobacco. But even Cuba has joined the trend.

Perhaps the slowest entity to give in and make heavy ring gauges, Cuba's Habanos S.A. has spent the last 10 years slowly discontinuing its smaller ring gauges a little bit at a time. To the chagrin of traditionalists, Cuba's selection of lonsdales and panetelas have been severely diminished in favor of ring gauges that reach 54, 55 and 56 diameters. Each year a few slim cigars disappear, some thicker ones take their place.



Recall how Habanos beefed up its H. Upmann line by eliminating so many diminutive cigars and slowly added smokes to the regular rotation like the Connoisseur A (52 ring gauge) Magnum 54 (54 ring gauge) and even a limited-edition Magnum 56 (56 ring gauge). Or how about Cohiba? The brand was born as a slim-sized panetela at 38 ring gauge for Fidel Castro and his diplomatic guests. When Cohiba went commercial in 1989, all the sizes, save for one, were thinner than 50 ring. Granted, Habanos still keeps its skinny Cohibas in production, but who would have thought that subsequent additions would be so bulky? Cohiba Behike, the most expensive Cuban cigar brand, ranges from a ring gauge of 52 all the way up to 56. The Siglo VI has a 52 ring gauge, the Pirámides Extra is 54 ring and the limited-edition Robustos Supremos is 58 ring.

Other new Cubans are also fat, such as the Romeo y Julieta Wide Churchill, rolled in a ring gauge of 55, and the fairly new Partagás Serie E No. 2, with a 54 ring gauge.

But the most prominent fat cigar example out of Cuba is another Cohiba, the Cohiba 50 Aniversario. The 7-by-60 smoke comes in a special-edition humidor created last year in celebration of the brand's 50th birthday. For now, it's Cuba's only 60-ring-gauge parejo (or straight-sided) cigar.

"I'm not sure what's driving the popularity," says Mitchell Orchant, who owns 12 cigar shops across the United Kingdom, including a Casa del Habano, "but I think it may be a younger generation of cigar smokers enjoying the greater volume of flavor from a larger ring gauge, rather than slender more concentrated strength found in more traditional sizes like coronas and lonsdales that an old boy like me prefers."

The biggest Cuban smokes have emerged as some of his best sellers. "Large format Havanas are becoming super popular in London and the U.K. Romeo Wide Churchills have entered our top-10-selling Cubans and demand for Behike 54 and 56 is insatiable."

In 2012, as the trend was starting to normalize, Perez-Carrillo started a brand called Inch by E.P. Carrillo. Not one size is thinner than 60 ring gauge, and the fattest is 70 ring. The entire line is a tribute to girth.

It's called Inch for a simple reason: the 64-ring version of the cigar measures a full inch in diameter. According to Perez-Carrillo, the Maduro No. 64 is the most popular cigar in the line.

"When I left General [Cigar], everybody wanted me to come out with the same brand as La Gloria, but I wasn't going to do that," Perez-Carrillo says. "Inch was based on tobaccos from growing zones and seeds that weren't available in the past."

Perez-Carrillo has been making cigars for more than four decades, and he has seen trends come and go. He feels this one has legs. "At this point, there's still a strong appetite for big cigars," assures the godfather of large-ring-gauge cigars. "It's not a fad. It's here to stay." ❖



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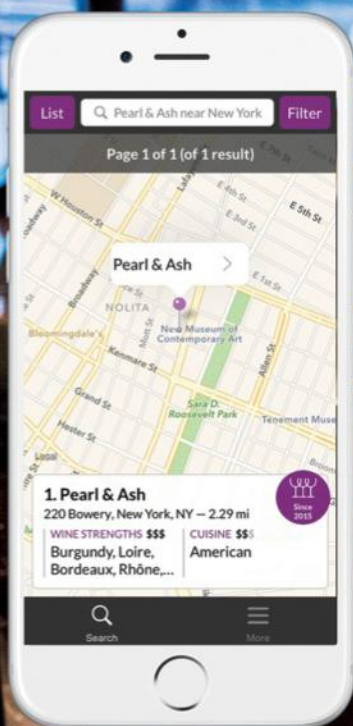
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Fidel Castro, 1926–2016

Fidel Castro, who ruled Cuba for decades and was the cigar-smoking symbol of the island nation for much of his life, died on November 25 at the age of 90. His brother, Cuban president Raúl Castro, announced his death on Cuban television.

Castro had been in poor health for some time, and had been largely absent from public view. In 2006, he underwent major intestinal surgery and handed over power to his younger brother. In October 2012 he was said to have suffered a major stroke.

In Miami, people took to the streets in the early hours of November 26 as news of Castro's death filtered out on American television and via social media. Many shouted "Cuba libre," or "free Cuba."

In Cuba, Castro was cremated, and his ashes were taken around the country for more than a week before being placed inside a large boulder in a cemetery outside Santiago de Cuba, about 60 miles from where he was born.

Fidel Alejandro Castro Ruz was born on his father's sugarcane farm in Birán, an agricultural town in southeastern Cuba located 500 miles from Havana, on August 13, 1926. Studying at the University of Havana, he became a lawyer and found himself at odds with Cuba's ruling class. He founded a revolutionary movement that culminated in his troops seizing control of Cuba on New Year's Day 1959, deposing president Fulgencio Batista.

Castro was initially hailed as a hero by many in the Cuban cigar industry. However, he soon led sweeping changes that made Cuba's cigar

factories and famous cigar brands property of the Cuban state.

"I was in Cuba when Fidel Castro came down from the hills," said Frank Llana, the late maker of the Honduran Punch and Hoyo de Monterrey cigar brands, in a 2002 *CIGAR AFICIONADO* story. "Everyone was very happy. That changed very quickly."

In 1960, Castro's troops nationalized the Cuban cigar industry, seizing factories and fields, and claiming Cuba's cigar brands, including Partagás, Montecristo and H. Upmann, as properties of the state. Cuba would do the same to other industries, resulting in the exodus of many of the country's business owners, who lost their properties and assets to nationalization.

Castro sparred famously with the United States, which declared a full embargo on Cuban goods (still referred to in Cuba as *el bloqueo*, or "the blockade") in 1962. The embargo remains, although U.S. President Obama has issued executive orders lessening its

effects, including allowing American travelers to return home with Cuban cigars and rum for personal consumption.

One of the legends about Castro was a CIA plot to kill him with an exploding cigar, as he was nearly always seen in his younger years with a cigar in his mouth. The cigar that began as his personal blend, Cohiba, became Cuba's most important and highest-valued cigar brand. Castro said he gave up smoking cigars at the age of 59, a development he revealed during an exclusive interview with Marvin R. Shanken that appeared in the Summer 1994 issue of *CIGAR AFICIONADO*.

"The cigar has made our country famous. It has given prestige to our country. Cuba is known among other things for the quality of its cigars," Castro told Shanken during the interview.

When asked about his love of cigars, Castro said: "I enjoy a cigar because of its aroma, its taste and watching the smoke."

Castro held various titles over the years: prime minister (1959 to 1976), president (1976 to 2008) and first secretary of Cuba's communist party (1961 to 2011). While the names have changed, his rule over the country was considered absolute up until he transferred power to his brother—and many believed he still ran the country after that. ♦

—David Savona

For much more on Castro, including the full text of his interview with Marvin R. Shanken, editor and publisher of *CIGAR AFICIONADO* magazine, visit CigarAficionado.com

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FEATURED CIGAR

**ASHTON SYMMETRY
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For a full tasting, see page two.

93 POINTS

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TOP 25 CIGARS OF 2016

THE BEST CIGARS OF THE YEAR will be showcased in the February issue of *Cigar Aficionado* along with the top-rated Best Buys and most exciting New Releases of 2016. But don't forget the regular tasting section, where we also rated 83 cigars. For a preview of the issue's top-scoring smokes, turn to page two.

FIDEL CASTRO: 1926–2016

THE ASHES OF CUBA'S FORMER PRESIDENT FIDEL CASTRO were interred on Sunday in a tomb that reads "Fidel" on a plaque. He died on November 25 and was cremated before his ashes were brought to Santiago de Cuba, 540 miles southeast of Havana and the birthplace of Castro's Revolution. He ruled Cuba for decades after overthrowing the previous Batista regime in 1959 and has been widely regarded as a controversial figure ever since. Many mourned Castro's death as the passing of a benevolent leader. A few hundred miles away in Miami, others saw him as an oppressive dictator and celebrated his death in the streets. Turn to page five for the obituary.

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CIGAR WATCH

FROM THE EDITORS OF CIGAR AFICIONADO
SEPT. 27, 2016 | SIGN UP

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FEATURED CIGAR

Punch Gran Puro Santa Rita (91 Points)

The Punch Gran Puro line came onto the scene in 2003 as General Cigar's only Honduran puro, meaning that it uses only tobacco from Honduras. The Santa Rita size (4 1/2 inches by 52 ring gauge, \$5.29) recently impressed our tasting panel with notes of cashew, hints of fresh coconut and a toasty finish, earning a score of 91 points in August's *Cigar Aficionado*.

[Click For More Punch Gran Puro Ratings](#)

11 Cigars You Should Be Smoking Right Now

Cigar Aficionado's 133rd blind tasting, which appeared in our August 2016 issue, is now live on our website. Of the 82 cigars rated by our panel of editors, 11 non-Cuban cigars scored 91 points or higher. These cigars are considered outstanding on our 100-point scale. So if you're heading to your local brick-and-mortar, here are a few cigars that are sure to please right now.

[Read Full Story](#)

La Palina Launches Value-Priced Goldie

La Palina Cigars has shipped a modified version of its popular Goldie blend called Illumination. The cigar features the same component tobaccos as Goldie minus the rare and expensive medio tiempo leaf that's nestled inside the limited-edition line of Goldie cigars.

[Read Full Story](#)
[La Palina Cigar Ratings](#)

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Attendees hold up their coupon books while anxiously awaiting the start of Friday's Big Smoke Evening event.

Big Smoke Lights Up Las Vegas for 21st Year

For more than two decades, cigar fanatics from across the globe have made a pilgrimage to the sun-roasted streets of Las Vegas. They arrive by airplane, bus and car, landing on the hot pavement of Sin City with a shared goal in mind: to smoke handmade cigars, drink fine spirits and attend educational tobacco seminars. For these cigar devotees, all roads lead to CIGAR AFICIONADO's annual Big Smoke weekend.

Nearly 4,000 people trekked out to the event in November, which kicked off with a traditional Friday evening celebration. The audience embraced friends and loved ones, shook hands with their favorite cigar-makers and collected a lion's share of smokes from more than 35 premium cigar brands. For the first time in Big Smoke history, a special VIP ticket was offered that allowed patrons access to the event an hour earlier—meaning more time for participants to smoke, relax and take pictures with cigar icons such as Carlos Fuente Jr., Rocky Patel, Litto Gomez, Manuel Quesada, Ernesto Perez-Carrillo, Jonathan Drew, José “Pepin” Garcia, Rick Rodriguez, Rafael Nodal, A.J. Fernandez, Nestor Andrés Plasencia, Pete Johnson, Bill Paley, Jochi Blanco and many more.

The next morning brought a series of educational seminars. Executive editor David Savona introduced the top three legal cigars of 2015 and invited audience members to light up the award-winning smokes throughout the program. Smoke began to fill the room, and the first panel took off with senior editor Gregory Mottola and associate editor Andrew Nagy speaking to three cigar family heirs; Tony Gomez of La Flor Dominicana,

Raquel Quesada of Quesada Cigars and Liana Fuente of Arturo Fuente Cigars. The three discussed their experiences growing up in a cigar family, and their future plans for each respective company. At the next panel, three cigar industry veterans took to the stage to speak at length about the anatomy of a cigar. Perez-Carrillo, Litto Gomez and Plasencia expressed their views on what they look for when evaluating tobacco.

The morning continued with a discussion on Cuban cigars. Savona and senior contributing editor Gordon Mott conversed about the new, legal ways to bring Cuban cigars back to the U.S. Next, a panel on Honduran cigars followed, with experts Joel Alvarenga from Altadis U.S.A., Christian Eiroa of CLE Cigars and Patel. After, there was a seated lunch hosted by José Oliva, president of Oliva Cigar Co.

Another Big Smoke Evening took place Saturday night, and the seminars resumed the following morning, starting with breakfast by chef Nicole Brisson of CarneVino Steakhouse. The famed ‘Roll Your Own’ cigar seminar followed immediately afterwards, and the seminars wrapped up with a series of Scotch and cigar pairings, during which senior features editor Jack Bettridge and David Savona led a raucous question-and-answer session, bringing Big Smoke Las Vegas to a spirited end. ❖

—David Clough

For complete coverage of the Las Vegas Big Smoke, go to CigarAficionado.com



CIGAR AFICIONADO executive editor David Savona welcomes guests to the Saturday seminars.



The Honduran Cigars seminar hosted by CIGAR AFICIONADO senior editor Gregory Mottola featured Rocky Patel of Rocky Patel Premium Cigars, Christian Eiroa of CLE Cigars and Joel Alvarenga of Altadis U.S.A.



Joe Paller from Los Angeles, California, celebrated his eighth year attending the Big Smoke Las Vegas with a stop at the Crown Royal booth on Friday night.



The Big Smoke is famous for bringing cigar-loving friends and family together. This year, Dominic and Dante Cipponeri bonded over fine cigars and spirits.



Maria and David Gonzalez, who traveled from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to attend their first Big Smoke, found out cigar rolling isn't as easy as it looks.



Raquel Quesada of Quesada Cigars, Liana Fuente of Arturo Fuente and Tony Gomez of La Flor Dominicana were featured on the "Next Generation" panel.



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CIGAR AFICIONADO editor and publisher Marvin R. Shanken takes in a fine November evening at New York City's Grand Havana Room by enjoying premium cigars alongside friends Rudolph Giuliani and Wayne Suarez.



Craig Miller, Gillis Poll, Congressman Peter T. King, Bert Brodsky and Joel Robinson gather to celebrate camaraderie by indulging in a couple of savory smokes at Havanas Cigar Club at The Carlton in East Meadow, New York.



The Luzzi family savors fine Montecristo and Cohiba cigars at the wedding of their youngest brother Nicholas at the Litchfield Inn in Litchfield, Connecticut.



Krasdale Foods hosts its annual cigar dinner, where Liga Privada and Padrón Anniversary cigars are enjoyed at F&J Pine Restaurant in the Bronx, New York.



A round of golf and a couple of premium cigars fit the bill for Bob Castelli, Rob Bain and Ted Sheridan as they hit the links at The K Club in Kildare, Ireland.



Members of the Ohio State University Rugby Football Club recall their glory days over fine cigars at their 50th anniversary dinner in Columbus, Ohio.



Joe Held, Anders Larson and Tim Held gather to celebrate the good life by enjoying premium cigars and Scotch at "Al's shack" in Saint Paul, Minnesota.



Esteemed members of the Kappa Alpha Order gather to indulge in Oliva Serie V Churchill Extra cigars at their office in Mulberry Hill in Lexington, Virginia.



Fathers and sons Ben and Steve Adler and Howard and Jesse Blumenau enjoy Montecristo No. 2 cigars during family weekend at The University of Arizona.



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On a beautiful day in La Romana, Dominican Republic, Brad Vassar and Wayne Chaplin from Southern Wine & Spirits tee it up at Casa de Campo's Teeth Of The Dog course with CIGAR AFICIONADO editor and publisher Marvin R. Shanken and Jim Clerkin of Moët Hennessy.



David Parmentier celebrates his graduation from Winona State University by smoking cigars with his parents Dave and Karen, brothers Jake and Alex, Bryanna Koehnle and Gina Molinaro.



Lou Genovese, his father Louis Genovese Sr. and brother-in-law Teddy Koulouris always have a smoke at Cuesta-Rey Cigar inside Tropicana Field before their Tampa Bay Rays take the field.



No wedding day is complete without cigars! These esteemed groomsmen light up a couple of savory smokes with Taylor Heffner on the day of his spring wedding to Helen Edgar at the beautiful Fleur De Lis Mansion in the Lower Garden District of New Orleans, Louisiana.



Andrew Zublionis celebrates his wedding day by savoring Oliva Serie O cigars with his father Bill and stepfather Vic Tolomei at the Santa Barbara Hosteria Hacienda in Gualaceo, Ecuador.



Marking a milestone with fine cigars, Dominic Persino celebrates his 90th birthday with his son Jimmy by savoring Romeo y Julietas at the Cigary International lounge in Wilmette, Illinois.

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Friends and family help bride and groom Lacy and Jace Leggett from Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, celebrate their August wedding by savoring premium cigars in Las Vegas, Nevada.



Bejan Makarechian and Llinedy Almanzar celebrate their wedding with a giant cigar party alongside friends and family at the Jellyfish Restaurant in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic.



A group of cigar-loving friends known as The Royal and Ancient Cigar Society join together for an afternoon of fine cigars and libations at the Mariner Sands Country Club in Stuart, Florida.



Father and son Jeff and Spencer Vining tailgate with cigars before a Michigan State football game in East Lansing, Michigan.



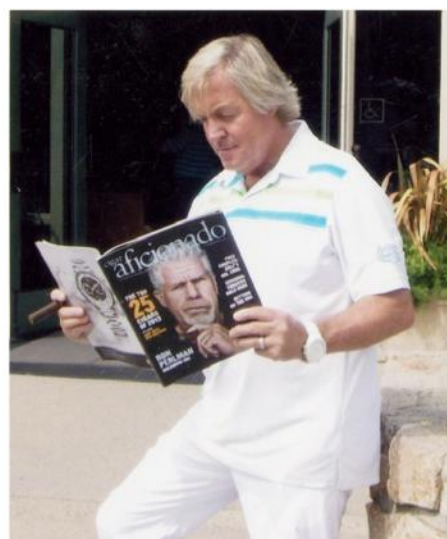
Friends Jason Cross and John Garcea indulge in a post-meal cigar while walking back to the Aria Resort and Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada.



Members of the Honolulu-based cigar club Beef Jerky Time pose, and smoke, alongside Andre Farkas of Viaje Cigar Co. and Abe Flores of PDR Cigars at a joint event in Waikiki, Hawaii.



Rick Brannan and Darrin Morris savor a visit to Don Lucas Cigars in the Dominican Republic.



Barry White catches up on some reading before teeing off in Pebble Beach, California.

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Let's go Cubs! Father and son Gary and Cam Thompson smoking fine cigars before game 3 of the 2016 World Series at Wrigley Field in Chicago, Illinois.



Grandpa, son and grandson. Three generations, all named George Sella, all enjoying their leisure time with a premium cigar in Waxhaw, North Carolina.



John Doerich of Rochester, New York, pays a visit to his son Robert in Tokyo, Japan, where they share a Cuban cigar at Le Connaisseur cigar bar in Roppongi.



Michael Diane and Jerry Keehn celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary by smoking premium cigars at The Biltmore Hotel in Coral Gables, Florida.



Dave Patterson of Miami, Ohio, shares a birthday cigar with his two sons Ryan and Andrew Patterson, his friend Doug Fisher and his father Bob Patterson.



Congratulations to the happy couple! Alison and Nathan Russell and their wedding party hoist cigars on their special day in Paso Robles, California.

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1 PERSONAL DOCUMENTARY—STORYKEEP

Ever admire the work of people like Ken Burns and think, “That’s great, but I’d like something a bit more close to home?” That’s the concept behind StoryKeep, the ultimate family selfie in which the Brooklyn-based production company produces a documentary of your family. Using historians, archivists, a producer, cinematographer, and an interviewer, StoryKeep delves into your family’s past and poignant stories to create a modern heirloom. Founded by NYC radio reporter and TV host Jamie Yuenger, StoryKeep can produce a book (starting at \$20,000) or film (starting at \$40,000) project. storykeep.com

2 BESPOKE PICNIC—ROLLS-ROYCE

Call it the Rolls-Royce of picnic hampers—literally. The leading name in luxury motoring has set its sights on the outdoor luncheon niche with this custom fine-dining set. The Rolls-Royce Picnic Hamper features crystal glassware from the Ajka Crystal factory in Hungary, stainless steel cutlery hand-made in England and porcelain plates from Wedgwood, the renowned fine-china factory that dates back to 1759. The picnic hamper, which accommodates four diners, retails for \$30,000. Choose your guests accordingly. rolls-roycemotorcars.com

3 SNAZZY GOLF BALLS—SHELL

The name Dean Snell might not ring familiar, but his 25-year résumé is impressive. He worked on two of the golf world’s most storied balls, the Titleist Pro VI and the TaylorMade Penta. Snell is out on his own now, and his Snell Golf aims at selling tour-level products directly to amateurs at a reasonable (\$32 per dozen) price. Snell’s My Tour Ball is a three-piece golf ball, with a soft urethane cover for feel and a low compression core for reduced driver spin. snellgolf.com

4 MUDDLERS WITH A TWIST—CORK POPS AND RABBIT

The new age of classic drinking has put figurative stress on the need to muddle fruit in your cocktail (even as it puts extra literal stress on your arms as you relentlessly crush ingredients). Accordingly, the Old-Fashioned just met the new-fangled with two modern spring-loaded tools: the Giovanni Action Muddler (pictured) and Rabbit Push Muddler (not shown). You use them like a pogo stick, pushing down into the glass, and the contraptions add a twisting motion to the process. corkpops.com and rabbitwine.com

5 IF THE SHOE FITS—BLUPRINT

The design principle that drives shoemaker Blueprint is simple: style matters, but fit and comfort matter more. Each of the company’s superlight silhouettes, from its plimsoll canvas sneaker to its chukka-style boot, feature 4 mm of proprietary foam and 2 mm of “slow recovery” memory foam in a sole that conforms to your foot. Combine this soft tech with a shape that allows your foot to flex, splay, balance and propel as nature intended, and you have one seriously comfortable piece of footwear that will feel as though it is custom-made with your feet in mind. blueprintcomfort.com

6 STEAMY STYLER—LG

What? You don’t have a gentleman’s gentleman to look after your wardrobe. Harnessing the chemical-free power of steam to refresh your garments and free them of wrinkles (and cigar smoke), the new LG Styler (\$1,999) can help. The slim appliance stands about 6 feet tall and does not require a water hook-up. Simply hang your suit or shirts inside, press a button on the door’s full-touch panel and the TrueSteam technology, which operates at only 40 decibels, will do the rest. lg.com



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